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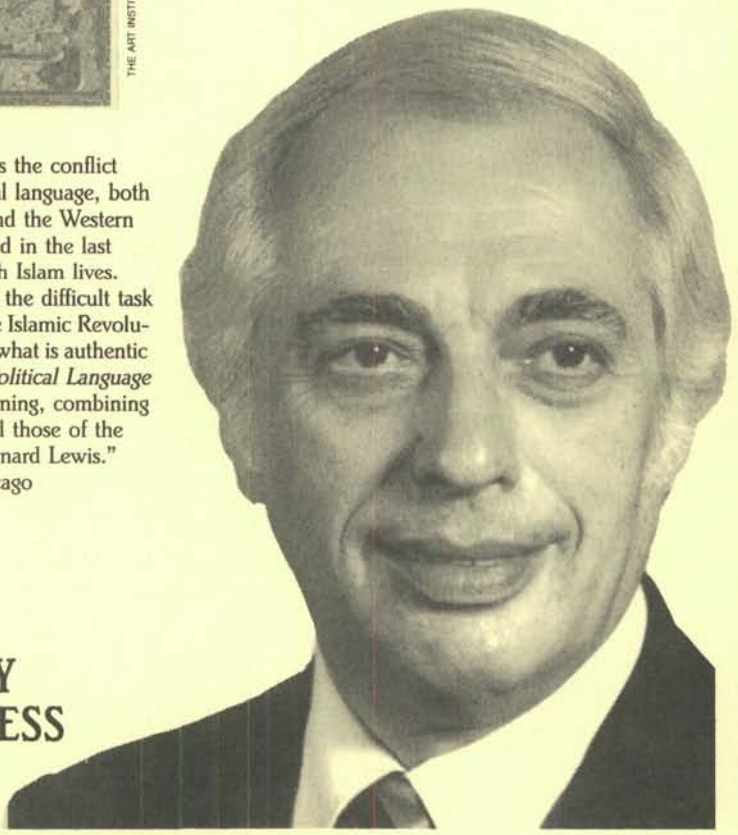

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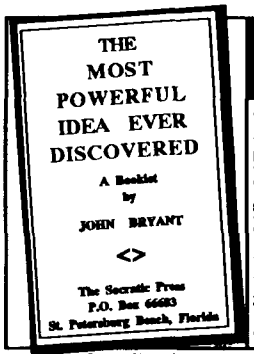

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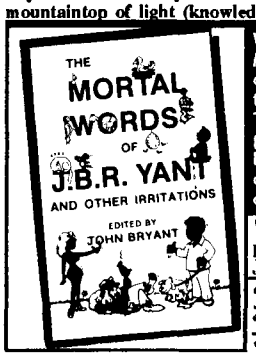

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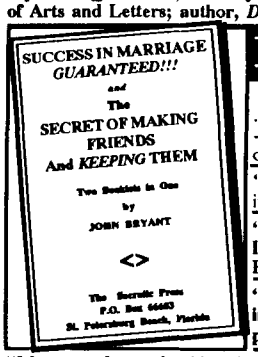

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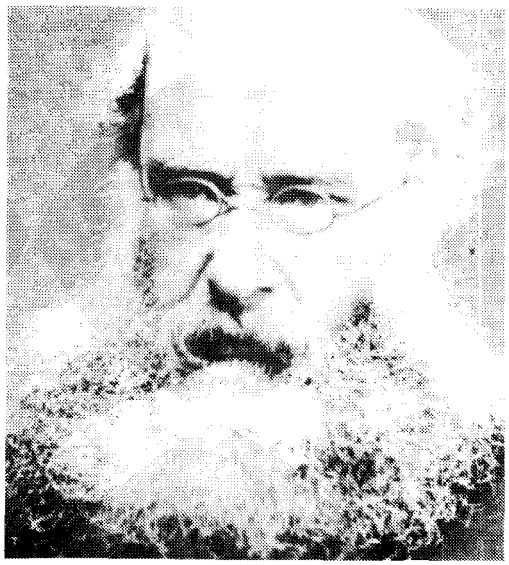

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Life and Letters . . . . . .

Calm and Uncollected

ARISTIDES

As part of an unending quest for ever-more frivolous closings to letters, I have of late, in writing to people who know me fairly well, taken to signing myself "Yours in Scouting." I may have picked this up from the young H. L. Mencken, who used to sign some of his letters "Yrs. in Xt.," the "Xt." being an abbreviation for Christ. Mencken's relation to Christianity was not so different from mine to scouting. Mastery of the map and the trail, the lanyard and the camp fire, even minimal competence in the arts of self-sufficiency, let us not even speak of survival—no, decidedly, these have never been my long suit. I may not have reached the stage of the late Whitey Bimstein, who, when asked how he enjoyed the country while training a fighter outside New York, replied, "It's a pretty nice place." But when lost in a strange environment, I call a cab; alone and hungry, I dial room service. I can make two knots: one for my shoes, the other for my necktie—but that's it. Put an X-acto blade in my hand and I am likely to show you an all-too-lifelike imitation of the great pitcher Three-fingered Mordecai Brown. It is, then, every bit as appropriate for me to sign my letters "Yours in Scouting" as it might have been for Marcel Proust to have signed his "Power to the People" or Thomas Mann his "Rock 'n' Roll Forever."

Unlike Mencken in his relationship with Christianity, I actually was a scout, a Cub Scout to be precise, but not for very long nor very happily. I think I joined for the uniform. As a kid, I was daffy about uniforms. The one existing photograph that shows me in a state of uncomplicated contentment was taken when I was four years old and wearing the uniform of the Royal Mounted Police. The Cub Scout uniform, which I donned at nine, was nowhere near so elegant, but it did have a yellow and blue scarf, a blue shirt of military cut with yellow trim, and a blue belt with a brass buckle. (I took a pass on the blue beanie with yellow stripes, which seemed to me hopelessly unheroic.) But for the uniform to become at all interesting it wanted covering with patches, cloth arrows, and various insignia of achievement. I was for sewing them on straightaway. Unfortunately, one had to earn them, and here my problems began.

I found no difficulty in learning the Cub Scout motto and salute, in honoring the flag, in finding an old lady—from the perspective of a nine-year-old, any woman past thirty would qualify—to help across the street. Where things became the least bit technical, however, I was in trouble. When I say "the least bit," I really do mean "the least bit." On the way to earning a Wolf badge, for example, one was supposed to be able to identify tools and to know how to use them. But, living in an apartment in a large city, we had no tools in our family, so there was no way I could, to quote the *Wolf Cub Scout Book*, "use a pattern or a plan to make a birdhouse, a set of bookends, or something else useful." Many of the scouting projects required to earn badges seemed to assume suburban or country living. One was asked to grow something, or know boating safety rules, or name five fish. I could only think of four: 1. White, 2. Smoked, 3. Herring in cream sauce, and 4. Gefilte.

What was a bit more disconcerting to me was the item that appears in the current *Wolf Cub Scout Book* as "Achievement 6. Start a Collection." Instructions for this begin: "You can collect almost anything. Put the things together so that you can show them to your family, den, and pack." This is followed by illustrations of collections of stones, shells, butterflies, stamps, coins, leaves, and patches. I not only collected none of these items, but I saw no reason to do so. Such things as I

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collected—odd bits of knowledge, baseball statistics, many prohibitions from my parents—were all stored in my head. I could not have been more different from the young Vladimir Nabokov, who, when eight or nine, roamed the woods on his father's estate chasing butterflies and fantasizing that "the only specimen of *Eupithecia petropolitana* was taken by a Russian schoolboy. . . ." At roughly the same age, I, without a net, sat at the counter of West's Pharmacy, a cherry Coke before me, catching if not quite capturing among Mr. West's customers some fairly exotic though wingless specimens of my own.

With so little interest in collecting, I was unlikely to collect any of the badges that I yearned to have for my Cub Scout uniform, and so before long I quit and left the scouting life behind. Yet many a boy I knew in those years didn't require the reward of a badge to keep a collection on his own. It was the day of the cigar box—Perfecto Garcia, Optimo Palmas, King Edward Imperials: names redolent of an adult masculinity that has now gone up in smoke—and boys filled these boxes with such treasures as marbles, lead soldiers, bubble-gum baseball cards, matchbooks, cigar bands. Girls tended to use their mothers' shoe boxes in which they kept collections of playing cards with lovely patterns, doll clothes, pictures of movie stars, sometimes beautiful seashells. After World War II, when metal was again available in greater supply, some boys with a bit of money in the family assembled elaborate electric train layouts, collecting on birthdays or at Christmas additional cars, buildings made to scale, billboards, shrubbery, and other bits of scenery. Middle-class girls had impressive doll collections; there were storybook dolls and a line of dolls from all nations that came in native costumes. This was before the odious doll known as "Barbie" came on the market and, with a wardrobe suitable to a divorcée looking for a loose man during a Labor Day weekend at Vegas, swept away the competition.

I don't wish to make myself out the bedraggled urchin with his nose pressed against the window of the pastry shop, but I collected nothing. I shot marbles, traded baseball cards, owned a small electric train (an American Flyer), but none of these activities really lit my fire, let alone enflamed me with the kind of passion that is required to organize a systematic collection. Why? Like Virginia Woolf in this if in no other wise, I had no room of my own, but grew up sharing a bedroom with my younger brother, and so I suppose there was not a great deal of extra room to store large collections. Yet had I the interest in collecting something, I am sure that my parents would have found the space for it, even though neither of them felt the collecting impulse in his or her own life. My mother brought back elegant china cups from trips to Canada, but she scarcely pursued this ardently enough for it to constitute a collection; my father, to hear him talk about some of the people with whom he did business, collected only bad debts.

Although there was plenty of good feeling to go round, ours was not a family much interested in things. We had no camera, therefore took no pictures, therefore kept no albums. Photographs, the majority from the 1920s and '30s, that were given to my parents were stored in a shoe box. Along with being collectionless, no one among us had that curious thing that would later turn up on job application forms with a question mark after it and that I never quite knew how to fill in—I refer to hobbies. (Perhaps this is why I have always liked the joke about the recently retired man whose new hobby is beekeeping and who keeps five thousand bees in a box in a closet in his small Manhattan apartment. When he shows the box to a friend, the friend tells him, with some alarm, that there are no air holes in the box and that the bees, without getting any oxygen, are certain to die. "Oh, well," says the man, with a shrug, "it's only a hobby.") Probably because my parents were the children of immigrants, who perforce traveled light, we had in our home no heavy nineteenth-century furniture, no portraits of ancestors—nothing, in short, in the way of family heirlooms. As a family, we lived with an extraordinary lightness of being, but—apologies to Mr. Kundera—it was far from unbearable.

Not that I didn't feel a tinge of admiration for boys my age who could form and sustain a collection. At age ten or eleven, I knew a boy who had an impressive collection of miniature cars. This same boy had a large collection of comic books, all neatly arranged. His room was nicely organized: a place for everything and everything in its place. He was an only child. Only children, unless I am mistaken, seemed to be more drawn to collecting than children from larger families. Perhaps this

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was owing to their having more time to themselves; not having a younger brother or sister to mess about with one's belongings may also have helped. I don't know if this boy had a stamp collection, but two dear friends of mine started to collect stamps though they soon dropped their collections. Philately, as the Chinese who do not pronounce English easily say, got them nowhere.

Had I attempted such a collection, I am confident that I would have got no further. Was there, I sometimes wondered, something in my temperament that made the enterprise of collecting impossible for me? Was I perhaps deficient in an important element of character? Had I insufficient patience, ambition, imagination, in much the same way that Evelyn Waugh once described cowards in World War II as having an insufficient death wish? I was, God knows, keen enough on possessions: I loved good food, liked nice clothes, wished for the best bicycle and sports equipment. No one could accuse me of being above desire. But everything I desired was intensely and immensely practical. An Abyssinian commemorative stamp in mint condition, a Carthaginian coin, a sixty-three-pound ball of tinfoil, none of these things worked any magic on me. Was I missing something essential in life?

People who were excited by their collections seemed to find nothing else quite so exciting. In childhood collections, I knew, many people had early discovered clues to their adult vocations: the girl interested in doll clothes became a fashion designer, the boy with the rock collection grew up to become a geological engineer. Others, once grown up, never ceased the collecting that in childhood gave them such delight. Recall the young Vladimir Nabokov, dreaming of discovering the rare specimen that will introduce his name into the lepidopteran equivalent of *Who's Who*. In *Speak, Memory*, his autobiography, Nabokov writes: "I have hunted butterflies in various climes and disguises: as a pretty boy in knickerbockers and a sailor cap; as a lanky cosmopolitan expatriate in flannel bags and beret; as a fat hatless old man in shorts." In a letter to Edmund Wilson, written when Nabokov was forty-three, he describes his excitement at catching moths in traps set along tree trunks in Vermont, and closes by imploring Wilson: "Try, Bunny, it is the noblest sport in the world."

Bunny—"the Bunny," as Karl Shapiro refers to Wilson—never did, but then it is unlikely that he ever would have, for obsessions, which collections often tend to become, cannot easily be encouraged or passed along to the next fellow. I have never read a comprehensive definition of the word *collection*, but one might set out a working definition as "an obsession organized." One of the distinctions between possessing and collecting is that the latter implies order, system, perhaps completion. The pure collector's interest is not bounded by the intrinsic worth of the objects of his desire; whatever they cost, he must have them. Except in the case of the rare and exciting find that turns out to be a bargain, he generally knows that he is paying more than he probably ought to for the items in his collection, but he cannot help himself. If he has any introspection, he begins at some point to sense that his collection possesses him.

I knew a man who owned a Dunhill pipe. The pipe was expensive, as he readily allowed, but it was a superior piece of goods, and he enjoyed smoking, and therefore the pipe was judged worthy of the expense. In time he bought another. He alternated between the two pipes, which in the arcana of pipe smoking is said to be good for pipes as well as for smoker, and this made very good sense, too. Then he bought a third Dunhill pipe, whose elegant shape and lovely rosewood lured him into further and now no longer quite justifiable expense, and then a fourth. Unlike a plumber, I shall not lay this out pipe by pipe. Suffice it to say that in the fullness—the emptiness?—of time he acquired some twenty-odd Dunhill pipes. He continued to take pleasure in smoking them, or at least his favorites among them, but his pleasure in contemplating them, arrayed in their shapeliness and their rich woody lustre in racks upon his desk, seemed even greater.

A bachelor, he lived on the twenty-ninth floor of a Mies van der Rohe building, where one night, well past midnight, a fire alarm sounded. When he stepped out of his apartment into the hallway, he, along with his neighbors, was instructed to avoid the elevators and to proceed quietly down the stairs. He had only time to return to his apartment for his bathrobe and—ah, you are a clever reader—his pipes. The fire turned out to be a minor one, the alarm a mere precaution, but that night, as he afterward related the story to

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me, he received another alarm, for standing there in the hallway in pajamas and robe, his arms filled with his pipes in their racks, he discovered what was really important to him. A man of learning and with a philosophical temperament to go with it, he was astonished at his own behavior.

A true collection ought to have—and a true collector is usually aroused by—an element of the hunt. In this sense, a collection of Dunhill pipes is not, technically, a true (or, better, pure) collection. One could, after all, with enough money, simply walk into Dunhill's, order the full line of the company's pipes, write a check, and be done with it. A true collector is excited by the rarity, above all by the apparent inaccessibility, of the objects of his desire. Money alone, to the exclusion of cunning and connoisseurship, oughtn't to be decisive. I not long ago heard a story about a Texan—such stories always seem to have Texans in them—who, wishing to become an art collector, made a beginning by buying, sight unseen, all the works presented in a fashionable contemporary show in New York. That, somehow, doesn't seem in the spirit of the thing.

Not that money doesn't generally lurk about the activity of collecting. Certain collections—gems, visual art, rare books—assume big money. But even collections of originally inexpensive items have a way of quickly getting expensive. Rare bubble-gum baseball cards can sell, among collectors, for thousands. At conventions of baseball-card collectors, ball players occasionally turn up to sign autographs for six and nine bucks a whack—and a pretty dreary whack it seems, at least to me. As eating is to touch, so miserliness is to collecting—the ultimate expression of the activity. The great misers of literature—Molière's M. Harpagon, George Eliot's Silas Marner, Balzac's M. Grandet—are essentially collectors who have cut out the middleman, the objects that make up a collection, and gone straight for the money.

Balzac describes M. Grandet as combining "the characteristics of the tiger and the boa constrictor"; such characteristics have not been unknown among collectors. The *New York Times* not long ago carried a story about a man, a collector of historical papers, maps, and books about Massachusetts, who in a New Hampshire bookstore discovered a rare first edition of Edgar Allan Poe's *Tamerlane* that he bought for fifteen dollars and that Sotheby's is expected to knock down for between two and three hundred thousand. Describing his find, the man is quoted as saying, "I got very excited." "Very excited," though, is not likely to describe adequately the feelings of another man, a dealer in antique Judaica, also reported in the *New York Times*, who, along with a partner, was taken for sixty thousand dollars when he bought a counterfeit version of a twelve-page Passover Haggadah supposedly printed in 1482. The first is a case of a boa enjoying his engorgement; the latter, a case of having been engorged. Let in the dollar and you welcome the squalor.

Yet it will not do to think of collectors chiefly as greedy, or fixated, or snobbish, although these have doubtless been among the private pleasures felt by some collectors. To collectors generally a great debt is owed. Consider, to take a stellar case, the Medicis. They were not for the most part a fun family, the Medicis, even though compared to the Borgias their family history reads like three centuries of "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet." Yet for all the family's faults—and toward the end of the line, in the late seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century these were not minor—its place on the honor roll of history is secured by its generous patronage to artists and its collecting activities. This place was permanently secured when the last of the Medici line, Anna Maria, before her death in 1743 at the age of seventy-five, in her will bequeathed all the property of the Medicis, paintings and statuary, books and manuscripts, furniture and jewels, to the succeeding grand duke, with one unalterable condition: that "nothing," as Christopher Hibbert puts it in *The Rise and Fall of The House of Medici*, "should ever be removed from Florence where the treasures of the Medici should always be available for the pleasure and benefit of the people of the whole world."

Collectors can be as different as Khalil Bey, a nineteenth-century Turk who assembled one of the finest private collections of art in the Paris of his day, and Benjamin Altman, the New York department store owner whose bequest of his art collection to the Metropolitan Museum at his death in 1913 was the greatest the Met had received up to that time. Khalil Bey was a ladies' man and a fabled gambler and a man who used his art collection to elevate his position in Parisian society; Ben-

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jamin Altman was deeply reticent and despised the notion of using his art collection to advertise his business and kept his treasures to himself and a close circle of friends in a gallery he built especially for his collection in his Fifth Avenue home. As if to highlight the variety of the personalities of collectors, Khalil Bey and Benjamin Altman appear as the subjects of back-to-back essays in Francis Haskell's recent book *Past & Present in Art & Taste* (Yale University Press).

No less remarkable in his way was the Fra Carlo Lodoli, who in eighteenth-century Venice began collecting Cimabue, Giotto, and other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian masters at a time when these painters were altogether ignored—Lodoli found their work among dealers in old clothes and near junk—in favor of such High Renaissance painters as Titian, Raphael, Corregio, and Veronese. In telling the story of Fra Lodoli, Joseph Alsop, in his book on art collecting, *The Rare Art Traditions*, at one point quotes Lodoli's pupil Andrea Memmi on the clutter, common to the surroundings of all collectors out of control, of the padre's quarters:

> To make his finds, he searched the stocks of "ragpickers and Jews who dealt in anything which had been discarded by others." Eventually, the finds became so numerous that the collection took over his whole life. The pictures were stacked, many deep, along the walls of his humble rooms. "There was nowhere to sit," except on "a pile of books or on his narrow cot, which had become his best sofa."

The tableau of Fra Carlo marooned among his masterpieces reminded me of a trip I made more than twenty-five years ago in New York to the apartment of a Russian emigré, a Kremlinologist, to pick up a manuscript he had written for a magazine on which I was a sub-editor. Any conversation that may have taken place during that brief visit has long since been washed away by the memory of the flood of paper that greeted me upon entering. Bundle upon bundle of pamphlets, pile upon pile of yellowing newspapers, column upon column of books, almost all of this material in Russian and in German, not so much dominated as inhabited the rooms I passed through. Amidst the intense disorder of this collection, this archive really, of material having to do with the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, the owner of the collection, a white-haired man of formidable physique, seemed diminished; so, too, did his companion, a Hungarian woman of Wagnerian proportions. Not since the paper drives of World War II had I seen so much paper in one place, such clutter raised to so high a power. I tried to imagine living amidst it; a son of the American middle class, with its regard for tidiness, I could not. Five or six years later, I read that the contents of that apartment had been bought by Stanford University for somewhere around a quarter of a million dollars.

Is there a moral to this story? Never throw anything away, I fear, is the way many might read it. Good advice this, so long as you have a house with eight or so bedrooms, a large basement, a three-car garage, and an outbuilding or two. For those of us who don't, the moral is not one we can easily live with. Yet I am nonetheless surprised by how often I meet people who have vast collections of one kind or another. A few years ago a man who wanted me to write a script for a one-man show about H. L. Mencken began our first meeting by handing me a newspaper clipping about his having recently sold a collection of Chicagoiana for more than six hundred thousand dollars. More recently, I met a man who has a collection of books published in the year 1902 and another collection of books that have "Jane" (his wife's name) in the title. This is, I suppose, more commodious than having a collection of Hudson automobiles, with extra parts stored in the attic (a collection of the kind owned by a man in Ypsilanti, Michigan, named Jack C. Miller), but I would just as soon stop with a collection of books published in the year 2102 and another collection with the name Shlomo in the title, and let it go at that. But I see that I have tipped my mitt, blown the gaff, let the cat escape the silken bag. Collecting, in three words, ain't for me.

Of course, I recognize the importance of the serious collector. Hilton Kramer, recalling the donations and bequests art collectors have made to museums, has remarked that "we are all, in a way, beneficiaries of the collecting enterprise." Scholars are, similarly, the beneficiaries of collectors of rare books and manuscripts. However mixed may be the motives behind such collecting, however mad may be the prices asked for art and rare books, if in the end the public benefits and learning progresses, then I say, "Croupier, spin the wheel!" I shall never in any case have the

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chips to play in these games, and so my choosing to stand back from them has something of the same moral authority as my decision not to attempt to qualify for the Olympics in the hammer throw.

It is at the level of what have come to be called—rather too cheerfully, in my view—"collectibles" that I have chosen to exclude myself. By now the word *collectible* has probably made its way into the most recent dictionaries; I take collectibles to be among those items that, though they might otherwise be considered useless, through their relative scarcity or rarity or novelty, have become not necessarily intrinsically valuable but nonetheless deemed worthy of collecting. Stores catering to the collectibles crowd, selling old toys, railroad lanterns, framed advertisements, things well beneath the level of antiques but above that of garbage, are now dotting the modern cityscape. They tend to have such names as Eureka!, Fibber's Closet, Recollections. Cute—assuming you like cute. I have heard of people who collect snow-showering paperweights, political campaign buttons, sheet music for once-popular songs, chewing gum from foreign countries. People take pleasure from these collections; they do not hurt anyone along their mildly acquisitive way. As the man in the joke says, "It's only a hobby."

Far from wanting a collection, I find that it takes concentration, care, and restraint *not* to collect. My wife and I currently have in our apartment perhaps fifteen hundred or so books; in my office at the university where I teach, I have perhaps another thousand. With little effort, I could double or even triple this number. I have striven not to do so: I do not look into book catalogues; I stay out of used-book stores, which I consider, for the bookish, the intellectual equivalent of pool halls; when I require a book for something on which I am working, I prefer in most cases to use library books. I give books away, I sell books, I try to be unsentimental in my decisions about keeping books, not permitting myself to believe that because I happen to have read a book I am justified in keeping it. And still the books roll in; and still the books pile up. They multiply like rabbits, descend like locusts, covering everything.

We do not have nearly so many records as books—perhaps, in all, two hundred or so albums. Nothing very exotic here, mostly recordings of the music of the great composers—no one beneath Telemann or Saint-Saëns—played by the famous performers; some Cole Porter, Gershwin, Rogers and Hart, and Noël Coward; some splendid jazz chosen by a friend with flawless taste in this line. The more I learn about music, the more music I want to acquire, and the temptation to buy more records is always present, even though I find it difficult to clear time for listening to the records we now own. Although I suspect I have the aural sensitivity of a rhinoceros, I am also tempted to buy compact discs, which are supposed to provide both better sound and greater convenience. We now have a cassette player in our car, and I have begun—slowly, cautiously—to assemble a small collection of tapes, for when driving on moderately lengthy trips it is delightful to listen to Bach, or Vivaldi, or Beethoven, or Mozart without the interruptions of commercials or the pretentious classical-music-station announcers. A friend has offered to set up an arrangement whereby I can record all our albums on tape. Records and discs and tapes, and I don't even want to discuss video cassettes, which, I gather, some people are now beginning to collect in a big way. To save space to accommodate all this, perhaps my wife and I would do best to have ourselves put on microfiche and turn the joint over to our possessions. "Things are in the saddle," wrote Emerson, "and ride mankind." Waldo, baby, you don't know the half of it.

"Why didn't she try collecting something?—it didn't matter what," thinks the father of Fleda Vetch, the heroine of Henry James's novel *The Spoils of Poynton*. "She would find it gave an interest to life, and there was no end of little curiosities one could easily pick up." More than a soupçon, there is a full gravy boat of Jamesian irony in this passage, for Fleda finds herself in the middle of the attempt of another woman, one Mrs. Gereth, to save a house filled with antiques that she has gathered over a lifetime and that are about to fall into the hands of a future daughter-in-law whom she, Mrs. Gereth, despises. James never describes these antiques—"the *morceaux de musée*, the individual gems," as he calls them—for, being Henry James, he works by suggestion and indirection, but he is altogether clear on the hold they have over the characters in his novel. " 'Things' were of course the sum of the world: only, for Mrs. Gereth, the sum of the world was rare French furniture and Oriental china." And later he writes: " 'Yes,' cried Mrs.

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Gereth, with a fine freedom of fancy, 'there are things in the house that we almost starved for! They were our religion, they were our life, they were *us*.' " Henry James well knew the power that mere things can take on if enough desire has been invested in them.

James himself seems to have had a proper appreciation for things without being bound to them. I have never been to Lamb House, the house James bought in Rye, Sussex, in his middle fifties and which he would later refer to as "my celibatorium," but I gather from photographs I have seen and accounts I have read that it was laid out and set up with an eye for comfort and quiet bachelor elegance. Having signed a long-term lease, James wrote to his brother William's wife Alice: "In the meantime one must 'pick up' a sufficient quantity of ancient mahogany-and-brass odds and ends—a task really the more amusing here, where the resources are great, for having to be thriftily and cannily performed." Thriftily, cannily, James must have performed, for all who visited him at Lamb House thought well of the place, including Edith Wharton, who knew a thing or two about houses and their decoration and who wasn't the least shy about being censorious in this or any other line.

So far as I know, though he appreciated beautiful things, Henry James consciously collected nothing. He did keep signed copies of books other writers presented to him. He had some 2,000 books in his personal library, which was richest, according to H. Montgomery Hyde in *Henry James at Home*, in modern first editions, many of them of authors—Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, Tennyson—published during James's own lifetime. About 250 to 300 of James's books were spoiled in an air raid of 1940 that destroyed the Garden Room at Lamb House, Montgomery Hyde reports, and many others were dispersed after his death. Some have been recovered, but, since James did not annotate the books in his personal library, the loss is less than tragic. Besides, as some people are meant to be distinguished ancestors rather than to have them, so Henry James was meant not to be a collector but to be collected.

On the back of the dust jacket of his book sits Mr. H. Montgomery Hyde, one stout Englishman, above a caption that reads, "H. Montgomery Hyde at Henry James's desk at Lamb House." I shall not describe the desk, other than to say that it is of the kind known as a secretary, with a front that drops down to provide a platform on which to write, and it appears to be in the style known as Empire. Whether it has any serious standing as an antique, I do not know; I do know that, even if it doesn't, I should stand ready to pay ten thousand dollars for it. There is not a single piece of furniture in our apartment that is worth anywhere near ten thousand dollars, but then neither has any of our furniture been owned by Henry James, Jane Austen, or John Dillinger. Ten thousand is a significant sum to me, yet I would pay it, without hesitation, for Henry James's desk. I want it because it belonged to James; I want it because it may well be talismanic. The more I think about it, the more I want it. I want it, as James himself might adverbially have put it, immensely and immitigably. I would be willing to go twelve thousand dollars for it, but not a penny more. (Letters from people offering to sell me socks, pen wipers, or baseball spikes allegedly once owned by Henry James will not be acknowledged.)

I not long ago noted with lofty contempt an auction that fetched some fancy prices for some of the belongings of Liberace. Cuff links worth at most $500 went for $2,750; a grand piano festooned with small mirrored tiles and covered with a clear lucite top brought $42,500. But these at least are objects. The prices that autographs can bring seem to me astonishing, not to say a bit mystifying. An outfit in Chicago called Signature Gallery, advertising itself as a place "where you can buy your piece of history," refers to its "investment quality autographs" and offers for sale autographs by Napoleon, Churchill, Ty Cobb, and Elvis Presley. An acquaintance recently told me that he had sold a small packet of letters written by the poet Delmore Schwartz for $1,800. Hearing that, I thought how pleasing it would be to be sufficiently famous to take this a step further and write and sell the originals of one's own letters, sending the carbons or Xerox copies to one's correspondents, thus earning a handsome, immediate reward for keeping up with one's correspondence.

Had I Henry James's desk, you may be sure that I would not fill its drawers with stamps or coins, or line up along its writing platform demitasse cups or enamelled eggs or various *tsatskes* from the Franklin Mint. Not that

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mine is a full-blown distaste for collecting such as is displayed by the young woman who is kidnapped by a butterfly collector in John Fowles's novel *The Collector*. She notes of collectors of all kinds, "They're anti-life, anti-art, anti-everything." No, my antipathy for collecting proceeds from what may be a deficiency in the single-minded organizational power required to mount a serious collection. Six or seven years ago, I thought about collecting fountain pens, and from time to time would stop in at secondhand shops to see if any old pens were for sale. I found an interesting pen or two, but soon grew bored by the whole thing. Another merit badge lost.

More important than my deficiency in organizational powers of the kind required for serious collecting may be an admiration I have always had for the ideal of traveling light. The first lesson a novitiate intellectual used to learn was a contempt for what was known as "materialism." This was not the same materialism that professional philosophers concern themselves with, but instead was a shorthand phrase for an interest in material comforts. The embarrassment at displaying too keen an interest in material comforts lingers today among academics, many of whom remain fearful of seeming to put things of the earth over things of the mind, so that the phrase "rarer than an English professor driving a Cadillac" is an altogether accurate figure of speech. But my anti-materialism pre-dated by several years my first having heard the word *materialism*, and went beyond material comfort into the realm of sentiment. As a boy, I threw away the autograph book signed by my grammar-school classmates and never for a moment considered buying my high-school yearbooks. What did I need such stuff for? Encumbrances, extra poundage, sheer surplus. Better to slim down, move fast, travel light.

Few things are more productive of comedy than having an ideal that in one's life one hasn't lived up to for more than twenty minutes. Such, alas, has been my relationship to the ideal of traveling light. By the time I was twenty-six years old I had four children under my charge. How is that for traveling light? I have since my early twenties owned houses and apartments and thousands of books and pieces of furniture and appliances and much livestock (in the form of dogs and cats)—more, as you can see, traveling light. One of my fantasies is to fly to Europe with only the clothes on my back and a credit card in my wallet. In fact, I am fortunate if I can get away for a weekend to South Bend, Indiana, without having to hire gun bearers. Travel lightly, I always say, and carry a three-suiter.

Otherwise weighted down by life though I may be, at least, I have been telling myself, I do not have a collection. I do not harbor anywhere in our apartment a mini-museum: an assemblage of lead soldiers in Crimean War uniforms lined up in battle array, glass bells laid out in a large plush-lined case, a knotty-pine recreation room filled with bazooka shells, Japanese flags, and other World War II mementos, a closet full of music boxes. I have, thank you very much, been spared all that.

Or so I thought, when it occurred to me that, in a locker in our basement there is a cedar chest filled with old magazine pieces I have written. A drawer under a bookcase in my office contains a number of my old manuscripts. In two different closets there are large storage boxes of my correspondence; one drawer in my desk holds little notebooks in which I have copied down quotations (the same drawer in which I keep folders with notes I have made for speeches and talks); another drawer has several notebooks filled with my journals. On two shelves in the closet in the room where I work rest extra copies of my own books. In that same basement locker there is a box of remaindered copies of my first book. At my office at the university there are more of my own books and copies of more of my magazine pieces.

No doubt I have left out a good deal, but I have mentioned enough, I believe, to make plain what ought to have been plain to me long before now—which is that I am far and away the greatest collector in North America, and hence certainly in the world, of the works of Nikolai Aristides. To have struggled so long to avoid having a collection and to end up collecting oneself—ah, the bitter irony, the ironic bitterness, of it all. Meanwhile, if anyone out there happens to have a copy of a review I wrote about fifteen years ago of a biography of Aldous Huxley, I am prepared to trade for it a Xerox copy, with heavy editorial emendations, of an essay on collecting. What the hell, I'll even throw in two carbon copies of letters to our plumber and a receipt for a bill for a Cub Scout manual.

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The Recovery of Practical Philosophy

STEPHEN TOULMIN

In a letter written in 1932, Albert Einstein spoke of the "nakedness and poverty" of philosophy with regret, but also some affection. People working in serious scientific fields like physics, he said, should treat philosophy kindly, because all of their subjects are its offspring, even though, by now, the Mother of Science seems to be not just aged, but barren too.

Einstein's letter draws attention to an odd feature of philosophy, which is no better now than when he wrote. People who work in the natural sciences share in more or less agreed upon tasks. But the agenda of philosophy is always contested: its scope and credentials have never been agreed upon, even by its classic authors. Those self-doubts have never been more striking or severe than in our century. In his 1929 Gifford Lectures, for example, John Dewey argued that, since the 1630s the philosophical debate has rested on too passive a view of the human mind and on inappropriate demands for geometrical certainty. In the 1940s, again, Wittgenstein tried to show how endemic confusions over the "grammar" of language mislead us into vacuous speculations. Far from being profound, philosophical questions only distract us from the important issues in life. I recall Wittgenstein saying, of a colleague in English literature at Cambridge, "What makes him think he understands William Blake? Why, he doesn't even understand philosophy!"

Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger also wrote caustically about the inherited philosophical enterprise; and Richard Rorty, surveying the whole debate, concludes that philosophers have nothing left to do but engage in a personal conversation about the world as they have found it, each as a separate individual. Putting down Rorty's essays, I carry away

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the image of a group of ex-soldiers disabled in the intellectual wars, who are sharing memories over a glass of wine of "old, forgotten, far off things, and battles long ago."

So philosophy's agenda is as problematic as ever. What can we do? Must we agree to regard all philosophical writings as "autobiography"? Or, if not, can we piece together an alternative agenda from the wreckage left by our parents' and grandparents' demolition work? I shall try, in this essay, to give at least a partial answer to that question.

This problem does not respond well to head-on attack, so let me sneak up on it from behind, by looking at the historical context. Here the current critique gives us a lot of clues. For a start, the philosophy whose legitimacy the critics challenge is always the seventeenth-century tradition founded primarily (but not entirely) upon René Descartes: what English and American philosophy departments, with unconscious irony, usually call "modern" philosophy. Though Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* starts from a passage in Augustine and criticizes positions from Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus*, his arguments (like Dewey's and Heidegger's) are directed at one particular style of philosophizing—a "theory-centered" style, which poses philosophical problems, and frames solutions to them, in timeless and universal terms. From 1650, this particular style (whose charms were linked to those of Dewey's "quest for certainty") was taken as defining the very agenda of philosophy.

Yet, just because of this fact, we need to look back further in time and ask, "How far did, or could, any one style exhaust the whole scope of philosophy?" To the contrary, I will argue that this definition of the subject sets on the sidelines a good half of the topics that had been discussed, as philosophy, throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages: from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, by way of Cicero's *De Officiis*, and right up to the Renaissance. The current critiques have left this neglected half of the philosophical field—what I shall here call "practical philosophy"—quite untouched. And, indeed, it is those neglected topics that are showing fresh signs of life today, at the very time when the more familiar, "theory-centered" half of the subject is languishing.

I

What issues, then, did seventeenth-century philosophers set aside? In four sets of topics and spheres of thought, they were especially *un*interested: the "oral," the "particular," the "local," and the "timely." These topics are connected, but we can usefully look at them in turn.

To begin with the "oral": Ever since Descartes, all questions about the *soundness* or *validity* of arguments are understood as referring to

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"arguments" in the sense of "chains of written propositions," and their soundness is seen to depend on formal relations among the propositions. The question, "*Who* addressed this argument *to whom*, in what *forum*, and using what *examples*?" is no longer a philosophical matter. As for Plato, the merits of arguments no more rest on such human facts than those of a geometrical proof rest on the accompanying diagram, even when drawn by a master draftsman. So "modern" philosophy ignores argumentation—among particular people, in specific situations, dealing with concrete cases, with different things at stake—in favor of "proofs" captured in writing, and judged as written

As history, this development explains what happened next. Platonists opposed rhetoric as "making the worse argument seem the better"; but Aristotle had rejected this libel, seeing "the conditions on, and the ways in which arguments carry conviction" as an issue that philosophers could address with clear consciences. Up to the late sixteenth century, they discussed that issue without any sense that it was irrational. The seventeenth century undid that good work, reinstating Plato's libel against rhetoric so successfully that the colloquial use of the word *rhetoric* has been deprecatory ever since, ignoring the merits of conscientious professional argumentation, and hinting at persuasive tricks for use in dishonest oral debate. To this day, serious students of rhetoric still feel bound to explain that the term is not necessarily insulting. From the 1630s on, in short, Formal Logic was In, Rhetoric was Out.

As to the second issue, the "particular," I shall cite the French mathematician Pascal. Medieval and Renaissance scholars handled moral issues by case methods like those in Anglo-American common law. Once again, they were following Aristotle's *Ethics*. "The Good," Aristotle said, "has no *universal* Form, regardless of subject matter or situation: sound moral judgment respects the detailed circumstances of specific kinds of cases." That insight nourished the practice of Catholic and Anglican casuists up to the seventeenth century; but, in the 1640s, Pascal published a series of anonymous pamphlets in defense of Antoine Arnaud, who was accused by the Jesuits of heresy in the ecclesiastical court at Paris. Pascal's target was the methods of moral analysis used by the Jesuits, based on concrete "cases of conscience" *(casus conscientiae)*, and his *Provincial Letters* ridiculed them with such ferocious sarcasm that he brought the whole enterprise of "case ethics" (or "casuistry") into lasting discredit.

Starting with the Cambridge Platonists, philosophers turned ethics into abstract theory, ignoring the concrete problems of moral practice. The modern philosophers assumed that God and Freedom, Mind and Matter, Good and Justice, are governed by timeless, universal "principles," and regarded writers who focused on particular cases, or types of

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cases limited by specific conditions, as either unphilosophical or dishonest. So, seventeenth-century philosophy again limited its own scope, excluding the examination of "particular practical cases" *by definition.* In a phrase, General Principles were In, Particular Cases were Out.

Likewise for the third issue, the "local." I use this word *local* as Clifford Geertz does in his book *Local Knowledge.* Early in the *Discourse on Method,* Descartes reports overcoming his early fascination with history and ethnography, where geometrical methods are of little power: "History is like foreign travel," he says, "it broadens the mind, but it does not deepen it." Ethnographers collect facts about all the local jurisdictions that Geertz examines, but the task of philosophy is to bring to the surface the general principles holding in any and all fields. For Descartes, curiosity is a human trait, but understanding does not come from accumulating the experience of particular individuals and specific cases. Reason always seeks for abstract, general ideas and principles to connect particulars together.

Plato saw malfunctioning cities as having specific pathologies, like Tolstoy's "unhappy families," and historians were free to study them, if that was their inclination. The philosopher's task was, rather, to study "happy" families and "healthy" cities and to find general principles of political health behind all local idiosyncrasies. For Aristotle, human affairs were open to no such generalization, so the diversity of political affairs was legitimate grist for the philosophical mill, as it remained right up to the sixteenth century. By dismissing history and ethnography, modern philosophy thus excluded a whole realm of previously recognized issues. From then on, Abstract Axioms were In, Concrete Diversity was Out.

Finally, the fourth issue, the "timely." Descartes and his successors do not discuss issues that involve given moments in time: now, not later, yesterday, not today. Earlier on, concrete issues of legal and medical practice (in which "time is of the essence") had an equal billing with abstract, theoretical issues; practical issues were all decided as the occasion required *(pros to kairon,* in Aristotle's phrase). A navigator's decision to change course ten degrees to starboard, say, is as "rational" as anything in mathematics; yet its rationality rests on when it is put into effect as much as it does on any formal computations involved.

For sixteenth-century scholars, law was the model "rational enterprise," and the possibility of a universal natural philosophy seemed problematic. A century later, the shoe is on the other foot. Philosophy focuses on the permanent underlying structure of Nature: the transient affairs of human beings take second place. As a result, issues of practical relevance and timeliness are sidelined—as not being properly "philosophical" at all. After the 1630s, law and medicine play only marginal

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parts in the debate; philosophers focus their attention, rather, on timeless principles holding good, not at one time rather than another, but at all times. From this time on, then, the Permanent is In, the Transitory is Out.

These four changes of mind—from oral to written, particular to universal, local to general, timely to timeless—were distinct. But when seen in context, they have several things in common: specifically, they choose to ignore the whole of *practical* philosophy—that is, the issues arising out of the clinical aspects of medicine, the procedures and practices of law, the rhetorical force of personal argumentation, and the moral methods of the casuists. So it was no accident that diagnostics and due process, case ethics and rhetoric, topics and poetics, were sidelined and discredited at the same time. Rational judgments of *practical* adequacy are timely not timeless, concrete not abstract, particular not universal, local not general. They concern people who have roots in the practical and pastoral arts, and the seventeenth-century "new philosophers" were theory-centered, not practical-minded. They were not interested in procedures for handling limited classes of cases or specific types of problems; they concentrated instead on abstract, timeless methods of deriving general solutions to universal problems.

II

Why did philosophy's agenda change so drastically at just this time? How can we explain this turning away, after 1630, from the oral, local, transient, particular aspects of language and life, and this preoccupation with written arguments, general ideas, and abstract principles?

Evidently, this change followed the rise of a *lay culture* in Europe. The main vehicle of medieval religious teaching had been oral preaching, which supported an interest in rhetoric. Reformation scholars read the Scriptures and commentaries for themselves and became interested in criticizing written arguments. As laymen, too, they were less involved in pastoral care than their ecclesiastical forerunners. Though discussing ethical theory, they were not actively responsible for the cure of souls. In these respects, the new philosophers were the first intelligentsia in Western history.

But something more is needed to explain why, after centuries of Aristotelian practical philosophy, the years 1620 to 1660 saw not just a renewed interest in universal, abstract theory but outright rejection of traditional practical concerns. Where should we look for this something more? I believe it is time for intellectual historians to take a page from the economic and social historians' book. All historians of early modern Europe (high Tories such as Hugh Trevor-Roper, as much as liberal

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Marxists such as Eric Hobsbawm) agree by now that the years 1610–1650 were a time of social disorder and economic retreat across Europe, so much so that they sometimes call the early seventeenth century a period of general crisis.

The origin of modern science and philosophy, as I myself was taught to think, treated them as by-products of mercantile prosperity; this gave scholars new comfort and leisure to pursue abstract speculations free of worldly distractions. The picture of general crisis makes that account implausible, and the truth is nearer the reverse. Early seventeenth-century Europe was far from being leisurely and comfortable; from 1620 on, people were ready to cut your throat or burn your house down just because they disliked your opinions, as in the Lebanon of today. So the real question is, Why, given such an uncomfortable situation, did philosophers find a "theory-centered" style of philosophizing so powerfully appealing?

To answer that question, permit me to take as my text John Donne's long poem, "An Anatomy of the World." Donne wrote this poem in 1611, just after the assassination of King Henry IV of France, who had been the main agent of religious tolerance in Western Europe. (We know that Donne understood the significance of this event from things he said in 1611 in another poem, *Ignatius His Conclave.*) With the sensitivity of a writer who picks up the feel of his time, Donne voices a conservative regret that the world is getting out of hand in a dozen different ways. His concern is not merely the warfare between Protestant and Catholic zealots, especially after the Council of Trent, though this is threatening to become unmanageable. It is not merely the decay of old political loyalties and allegiances, with the growth of trade and cities, and the rise of a class of people outside the traditional social network (the so-called "masterless men"), though this, too, is aggravating the current alienation. Nor is it just the general narcissism of his time, though Donne can deplore "extreme individualism" as vocally as Robert Bellah today. Nor is it, even, the radical doubts that Copernicus and the "new philosophers" are spreading about traditional ideas in astronomy and physics, though their skepticism is corroding the general confidence in providence and human reason. What shines through John Donne's poem is his response to the fact that *all these things are happening at once.*

Donne moves from civil war to physics, from politics to psychology, within just a few lines, in ways that almost defy punctuation:

> And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
> The Element of fire is quite put out;
> The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him where to looke for it. . . .
> 'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerance gone;

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All just supply, and all Relation:
Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,
For every man alone thinkes he hath got
To be a Phœnix, and that then can bee
None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee.

Evidently, the general crisis of the early seventeenth century was not only a social and economic one, but quite as much religious and cosmological; and this makes the change in the agenda of philosophy more intelligible.

To people caught up in a far-reaching, thoroughgoing intellectual crisis, the modest and undogmatic suggestions of "practical philosophy" looked, not untrue, but beside the point: fiddling while Rome burned. The more urgent task was to find a new foundation for all that had, after all, been sound in earlier ideas, and even more to revitalize cosmology, by developing a new, more rational theory of nature. Both of these theoretical programs—the "foundationalist" theory of knowledge that collapsed in our own times, and the system of physical cosmology that Isaac Newton inherited from René Descartes, which made the starting point for "modern" physics—were formulated in universal, timeless, mathematical terms quite foreign to the concerns of practical philosophers. But, for all that the architects of the new philosophy cared, given their own exciting new program, the whole of "practical philosophy" could take a back seat.

III

It is now time to put forth the more constructive questions. How does practical philosophy enter into our lives today? And how does it contribute to an agenda for the future of the subject that can blunt the force of current critiques? One good question deserves another, so let me ask in return: Since 1945, what problems have called for philosophical reflection on the deepest level, with any of the same urgency that cosmological theory had for people in the seventeenth century? The answer is, surely, *matters of practice*: not to overstate the point, *matters of life and death*. Since World War II, three sets of issues have imposed themselves on all reflective thinkers—nuclear war, medical technology, and the environment—and none of these three issues can be fully addressed without bringing back to the surface questions about the significance of human life and about our responsibilities not just to humanity but also to Nature.

Yet how far do these practical problems give rise to authentically philosophical questions? The people who discuss them most effectively

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today rediscover arguments that pre-Cartesian thinkers used four or five centuries ago. In analyzing the morality of nuclear warfare, for example, Michael Walzer revives a medieval argument about the criteria for telling "just" from "unjust" wars. The Just War debate is, of course, one central element in the case-ethics tradition that Pascal disowned; and we can scarcely hope to talk sense about the subject if we totally reject that tradition.

In discussing the role of technology in prolonging the biological life of dying patients, again, we confront issues about the relations between the personality and the body that revive the largely moribund problems of Mind and Body. Far from being purely theoretical questions about how we can distinguish psychological explanations from physiological ones, the issues now become intensely practical ones, about how we are to treat people at the crucial moments of their lives. Even before these new issues became so urgent, it was arguable that the Mind/Body problem cut right down the middle of most university departments of psychiatry: with the addition of this new, moral component, the issue becomes above all a practical one.

As for ecology and the environment, the essential thing to note is that the issue raises not just *utilitarian* questions, but *cosmological* ones too. This may not be obvious, because we tend to overlook the original goal of cosmology and equate it with a part of theoretical physics. Yet, in both Greek antiquity and seventeenth-century Europe, the order of Nature (or *kosmos)* was naturally identified with the fixed structure of the heavens, which was a stable background, or stage setting, for the changing drama of life. (Leibniz's fiercest objection to Newton's account of the solar system is that it gives no mathematical guarantee that the planets cannot get off track, and so disrupt the whole system!) Now, in the late twentieth century, our ideas about the order of Nature are quite different. For us, Nature is not fundamentally stable, as it was for the Greeks and Newton. Far from being an unchanging causal backdrop to rational human action, Nature now has its own evolutionary history; and human history is fully intelligible only when read in this larger context.

On one level, our intimate practical lives are now touched by what happened to green monkeys in Central Africa twenty or thirty years ago. On a more intellectual level, our basic ideas about social relations and political institutions are also in need of rethinking; instead of seeing society as a fixed "order" modeled on the solar system, with classes, genders, and occupations keeping to their proper orbits, we are learning to see those changing relations and institutions as so many more or less "adaptive" ways of meeting changing human problems. In this sense, too, our lives and thoughts are no longer confined within the fixed Newtonian world; and, in more respects than are as yet recognized, our cosmology today is a historically changing one.

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IV

Nowadays, then, philosophers are increasingly drawn into public debates about environmental policy, medical ethics, judicial practice, or nuclear politics. Some of them contribute to these discussions happily; others fear that engaging in applied philosophy prostitutes their talents and distracts them from their proper concern with quantification theory, illocutionary force, possible worlds, or the nature of *Erlebnis*. For these purists, I have a special message. These practical debates are no longer "applied philosophy": they are philosophy itself. To speak more precisely, they are legitimate heirs (to quote Wittgenstein again) of the theoretical enterprise that formerly called itself "philosophy." By pursuing these issues, we as philosophers both demolish the barriers between practical and theoretical philosophy and reenter the very core of technical philosophy from a productive new direction.

To illustrate this point, let me take clinical medicine as the type case of a practical enterprise and use it to do two things. First, let me briefly connect the theoretical problem of general timeless universals that was the starting point of seventeenth-century philosophy back to the local, timely, concrete issues that it set aside. I will argue that both kinds of issues are truly philosophical. Secondly, I will use this example to make some specific philosophical points about particularity, about experience, and about rationality.

To begin with the particular, we may contrast the aims of clinical medicine and biomedical science. People often think of medical practice as "applied science," thus concealing the particularity of patients and their medical conditions. A patient may be studied either by a clinician or by a scientist who is researching his or her current disease. The scientist's interest is in any general features the patient may share with others suffering from the same disease. The clinician's interest is in whatever can throw light on this patient, in that bed, here and now. The clinician's knowledge of the patient will be "informed by" biomedical science; but it is not, in its details, "entailed by" any biomedical theory and typically goes beyond everything that scientists can yet account for. The patient is not merely an "individual" who happens to "instantiate" a "universal law." His clinical state is local, timely, and particular, and universal theories at best throw only partial light on it.

Clinical knowledge thus differs crucially from any understanding of scientific theory. In the world of practical experience, we have greater confidence in our knowledge of specific concrete facts than we have in the general explanations that people offer for those facts. We know that chicken is good to eat better than we understand why it is (Aristotle's own example); and we know that aspirin helps headaches better than we

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understand why it does. Knowledge of clinical particulars does not rest only on their being individual "instances" of established "laws," since it always outruns the scope of those laws. Only in strictly mathematical fields have we more confidence in a theoretical understanding of general principles than in a practical knowledge of particular cases. In medicine (to be sure) theoretical and practical knowledge are not easily separated. Still, any belief that detailed clinical knowledge is a simple application of science misses the central points—that knowledge of particular cases is prior to, and more certain than, any understanding of general scientific concepts and theories.

To turn next to experience, the terms "clinical experience" and "practical experience" use this word *experience* in an everyday colloquial sense. For instance, Montaigne's essay "Of Experience" tells us about the things that happened to him and what kind of person he has become: how he tends to talk with his mouth full, fell off his horse and suffered a concussion, and finds his aging body helping to make him depressed.

Such ways of discussing experience may appear philosophically trivial, but they are central to the working of practical enterprises: clinical observation in medicine, direct testimony in law, even reports about experimental procedures in science. By contrast, ask modern philosophers to account for "sense experience" as a basis of knowledge, and the rich and concrete chronicle of everyday experience is at once replaced by a thin, abstract cortege of ideas, impressions, and sensations. What are we to make of this fact? Philosophy instructors often find it hard to get students even to see the "sense data" that are supposedly the primary stuff of the visual world: it was equally hard for E. B. Tichener, fresh from Wilhelm Wundt's laboratory, to get his students to perceive the yellow patches that were, on his theory, present in anyone's mind who heard and understood the word *yellow*. Set everyday practical experience beside the "sense experiences" of perceptual theory, in short, and "sense data" surely appear to be fictions, dreamed up after the event, to make good the missing links between epistemological theory and practical life. After visiting a friend recovering from surgery, Isaiah Berlin was heard to declare, "He's a mere *sense-datum* of his former self!" The willful incongruity of his remark shows us how far "experience," in the practical sense, differs from all these theoretical fictions.

Finally, as for logic and rationality, clinical diagnosis helps us dismantle the barriers between "logic" and "rhetoric," "argument" and "argumentation." Earlier I contrasted the *formal validity* of theoretical arguments with the *substantive soundness* of practical argumentation. Evidently, clinical diagnoses can never have the necessity of geometrical proof; they rest on the doctor's accumulated experience, along with

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any signs and symptoms that are available at the time of the diagnosis. So they are always open to revision or rebuttal, as the illness unfolds, and they support at best a strong presumption: From what one has to go on, the best diagnosis and treatment are, presumably, so and so. . . .

That is all that we ask of even the best diagnosticians; and it is the same in other fields of practical argument too. In a legal argument, even the best evidence does not entail any conclusion: it supports a judgment that, in the circumstances, cannot in fact be rebutted. Inferences within a theory pursue the detailed implications of ideas; practical inferences use those ideas to suggest how to handle particular cases. So practical judgments are not weaker than theoretical inferences; they differ only in being substantive and in reaching out beyond abstract conceptual issues to novel, concrete situations. Timely, substantive arguments depend not on entailments but on generalizations that are trustworthy on the whole—*kat'holou*—even though rebuttable in exceptional cases.

This point holds even in physics, where theories are used to explain particular phenomena. Newton went to great lengths in *Principia* to show that, on his definitions, a satellite moving freely near a massive body, under the influence of an inverse square attractive force directed toward that body, must have an elliptical or parabolic track; and several such satellites going round the same massive body must do so at just the relative speeds that Kepler had found in the visible planets—for example, Mercury, Venus, and Mars. Does this mean that Newton proved mathematically that the planets necessarily move as Kepler had shown they in fact move? Newton's admirers assumed that he had; but it was an illusion. His proof gives us reason to presume that the visible planets are satellites moving under inverse square forces; yet, practically speaking, that presumption was open to challenge for at least the next fifty years, while the theory was accumulating other support.

Scientific interpretations of actual physical phenomena are thus as open to revision or rebuttal—as local, timely, and particular—as are clinical readings of patients and their illnesses. The moment we leave the realm of theory for that of practical experience, the rebuttable presumptions of practical argument replace the formal necessity of theoretical inference. Consider, for example, the problem of conceptual change, to which much thought has been given over the last thirty years. What reasons do we need to justify giving up one scientific theory for another? Inductive logicians have offered quasi-mathematical "confirmation theories" to answer this question; finding these algorithms unsatisfactory, Thomas Kuhn gave us his theory of "paradigm shifts." Yet surely a theory of conceptual change misses the point. The practical decision whether to modify an old theory or abandon it in favor of a radically new one is itself a local and timely choice about a particular situation and calls for the same appraisal as any other practical decision.

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Given the whole situation in which we currently find ourselves, is it best to hang on to the older theory, or give it up? Some conceptual change may presumably be justified, in practice, by all that we know about the scientific situation in question; but the theoretical dream that one and only one change is "necessarily correct" remains the dream it always was.

To this day, then, the patterns of practical reasoning are rhetorical, not geometrical. Formal demonstrative inference is possible only if the concepts in the premises and the conclusion of an argument are the same; and in clinical diagnoses, for example, this can never be the case. In such fields as medicine and law, we bring experience of previous cases to bear on novel situations, and our conclusions hold good only to the extent that what was true of earlier cases is also applicable to future situations. Given this point, we have a basis for reconciling rhetoric with logic. The arguments within a theory or conceptual system may be "demonstrative"; but the arguments that apply theoretical ideas to practical situations, or which seek to criticize those theories, look outside the theories and so become "practical," or "rhetorical," arguments.

V

When I was a child in England, we learned W. S. Gilbert's couplet to the effect that

> Every little boy or girl that's born into the world alive
> Is either a little liberal or else a little Conservative.

We were also taught to divide human beings into two classes: those who prefer blue to green, sweets to savories, cats to dogs, and the other way around. The blue, sweet, cat lovers—we were told—also prefer Plato; the green, savory, dog fanciers prefer Aristotle. Now I am no longer clear what to make of these supposed correlations, though I don't rule them wholly out. A few years back, you may recall, William Gass wrote a perceptive essay, *On Being Blue*; and certainly my own Aristotelian tastes embrace shelties and green cheese. What *is* clear, however, is that philosophy displays a series of historical pendulum swings between two broad agendas. On one agenda, the task of philosophy is to say whatever can be said in any field of inquiry that is entirely general; on the other agenda, the task is to say whatever can be said that is as general as the field permits. Being practical-minded, Aristotelians will not claim universality for their views in advance of practical experience; being more

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theoretically inclined, Platonists are willing to speculate more freely and to hazard broader generalizations.

Understood in these terms, the seventeenth-century transition by which modern philosophy and modern science were launched involved a pendulum swing away from limited, practical, Aristotelian concerns to a Platonist program for developing general theories and solutions. Conversely, when Wittgenstein and Rorty claim that the present position of philosophy is "the End of the Road" for the subject, they overdramatize the situation. Rather, we are in the middle of yet another pendulum swing back, from a Platonically oriented, theory-centered style of philosophy toward the re-acceptance of more practical, Aristotelian concerns.

Some time ago, I wrote for *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* a paper called "How Medicine Saved the Life of Ethics." In that paper, I set out to show how—and why—even for philosophical purposes, the primary locus of ethical discussion has lately been moving out of the study and to the bedside. Similarly, the primary locus of the mind/body problem today lies in the realm of psychiatric practice; the primary locus of problems about causality, rationality, and responsibility in the criminal courts.

To say this is not to suggest that these problems have become the sole business of psychiatrists, lawyers, and judges, so that philosophers must hand them over to the specialists who alone really understand them. Quite the contrary. Psychiatrists, lawyers, and judges who address the general philosophical problems arising out of their respective practices often do so incompetently, and there is important work for philosophers to do in conjunction with such specialists.

Wittgenstein may claim that, if taken in isolation, the general theoretical issues of traditional philosophy quickly become vacuous. But, where something practical is truly at stake, all is changed. To quote an example from another of my Cambridge teachers, John Wisdom, philosophical problems are like the question, Is a flying boat a ship or an airplane? Taken out of all practical contexts, it does not matter what you reply. ("Have it your own way!" Wittgenstein says.) But if something serious is really at stake—if the force of the question is, Ought the captain of a flying boat to have an airline pilot's license, a master mariner's certificate, or both?—the issue comes into focus. Most law students, likewise, know the trick question about the phone call in which one judge asks another, Is a glove compartment a private house or a pleasure boat? The trick is to spot the constitutional point about search and seizure at issue—the police need a warrant before searching a private house for illegal narcotics, say, but not before searching a pleasure boat. So what about the glove compartment of a car?

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VI

The recovery of "practical philosophy," as I have called it, not only rescues us from the "nakedness and poverty" that Einstein complained of and Dewey diagnosed in *The Quest for Certainty,* it also gives us a way of digging ourselves out of the solipsism into which philosophy was plunged as a result of overgeneralizing the concepts of seventeenth-century mechanics. The sixteenth-century humanists—for example, Montaigne and Bacon—pioneered the art of individual self-examination and autobiography, but they did so in no spirit of narcissism. They viewed themselves as "sample" humans and had no problem about how different human beings understand one another. Fifty years later, the prison doors had closed, and philosophers were working in the shadows and under the threat of solipsism. This threat was still powerful at the end of the nineteenth century, when Ernst Mach wrote *Die Analyse der Empfindungen,* which was a starting point for the work of Bertrand Russell and much subsequent analytical philosophy.

It is from a student of Mach's that I shall take the material for the coda of this essay. Robert Musil began as Mach's *Assistent,* but he soon became aware of the curious ways in which the philosophical debate reflected broader oddities, not merely in the social and cultural life of Vienna, but in all of those dynastic nation-states into which Europe was reorganized in the late seventeenth century. Instead of remaining a philosopher, accordingly, Musil became a writer and spent the years between the world wars producing his very idiosyncratic book, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften—The Man Without Qualities*—a book we call a "novel" only because there is nothing else to call it. (Many of its chapters are, in effect, "essays" of a latter-day Montaigne.)

What Musil saw, and Rorty fails adequately to recognize, is that the end of modern philosophy carries with it, also, a critique of the extreme individualism that entered Western thinking as part of the seventeenth-century intellectual agenda. In a striking passage, Musil remarks on how far the enterprises in which human beings engage (their *Lebensformen)* have now taken on communal lives of their own:

> In earlier times one could be an individual with a better conscience than one can today. . . . Today, responsibility's center of gravity lies not in the individual but in the relations between things. Who has not noticed how independent experiences have made themselves of humans? They have gone on the stage, into books, into the reports of scientific institutions and expeditions, into communities based on religious or other beliefs, which cultivate certain kinds of experience rather than others, as a kind of social experiment; and insofar as experiences are not merely found in work, they are simply in the air. . . . There has arisen a world of qualities without a man to them, of experiences without

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anyone to experience them, and it almost looks as though, in the ideal case, people would no longer experience anything privately at all, and the comforting weight of personal responsibility would dissolve into a system of formulae for potential meanings. . . .

And all at once, in the middle of these reflections, Ulrich [the protagonist of Musil's book] had smilingly to confess to himself that, despite all this, he *was* after all a "character," even without *having* one.

There is nothing specifically autobiographical or individual about the methods and demands of our collective activities. On the contrary, we can discuss them as present-day counterparts of what Aristotle knew as "special topics," recognizing that the arts of Molecular Biochemistry and Criminal Law and Drypoint Engraving are larger than the personal contributions of all those individual biochemists, judges, and artists who put those arts to work. The significance of pragmatism (which Richard Rorty touches his forelock to, but then turns his back on) is then twofold: first, the encouragement it gives us to study the practical methods—the "topics," "dialectics," and "rhetorics"—of all these collective arts, in the context of the *Lebensformen* that embody them; and, second—which is what crucially distinguishes our position from Aristotle's—the fact that these *Lebensformen,* and the forms of thought that are "at home" in them, are not static, permanent "essences" that are capable of being known a priori and for good, but changing constellations or populations, whose historically evolving forms have to be discovered, by looking and seeing, after the event.

Only when we have finished exploring the collective arts of these enterprises and seek to go beyond them do we reach a point at which, perhaps, the move into autobiography can no longer be further postponed. As with Musil's protagonist Ulrich, our personalities and "characters" are shown not by our participation in these enterprises but rather in the ways in which we fashion private lives out of multiple public roles.

What was it like to inherit a seat in the parliament at Bordeaux, only to have your closest friend and colleague die in his (and your) mid-thirties? How can you reasonably deal with the conflicting demands of private and public life that such an event provokes? Again, what is it to be a talented organist and musical theorist who is also called to work as a medical missionary in Africa? How do you piece together a life that reasonably balances off the proper exercise of your musical talents with respect for your *Beruf*? These autobiographical issues raise questions about which a Michel de Montaigne (in one case) or an Albert Schweitzer (in the other) can write—as we say—"philosophically." To that extent, philosophy may well include at one extreme autobiographical reflections of the kind that Rorty talks about.

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But none of this rules out or discredits the more public, collective agenda that the current recovery of practical philosophy makes available to us: all the way across a spectrum of activities, from the problems of nuclear war discussed by a "new casuist," by way of the geriatric ward and neonatal intensive care unit, to the jurisprudence of capital punishment, and the philosophy of quantum mechanics. Taking "philosophy" in this *practical* sense, as a contribution to the reflective resolution of quandaries that face us in enterprises with high stakes—even life and death—Albert Einstein would surely think again about the "nakedness and poverty" of the subject and concede that it is time for philosophers to come out of their self-imposed isolation and reenter the collective world of practical life and shared human problems.

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Athens and Jerusalem in Indiana

JAMES NUECHTERLEIN

IT IS THE FIRST GATHERING OF THE FACULTY for the new academic year at Valparaiso University, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs is urging us on to excellence. He briefly reviews and commends to our closer attention several of the studies and criticisms of American higher education that have appeared in recent years. Even where they are wrongheaded or mutually contradictory in their conclusions, he suggests, they can still serve as touchstones for analysis or goads to reform; they should in any case help to keep us self-conscious as to what we are about and to relate our day-to-day academic routines to the larger educational enterprise.

But the Vice President does not stop there. It is necessary to the University's purposes that it achieve scholarly excellence, he reminds us, but it is not sufficient. We are, or want to be, a university with a difference. Valparaiso is a Christian university in the Lutheran tradition, a place where, in the language the Vice President appropriates from the second-century Latin church father Tertullian, Athens encounters Jerusalem.

Jerusalem and Athens. Faith and learning. The problematic and purpose of the Christian university. It is the language and circumstance I have lived with; off and on, much of my adult life, and the Vice President's imagery sets me off on a bout of nostalgic reflection.

II

When Father Theodore Hesburgh resigned as president of Notre Dame, he left an institution that was, in his estimation, both more Catholic and more academically distinguished than it had ever been

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before. That may well be true (though traditionalist Catholics might argue the former point), but if it is, it represents a startling exception to the dominant pattern of development in American higher education. Most private colleges in America began as religious institutions, but the paradigmatic path for them over time has led in the direction of ever greater secularization.

That has particularly been the case with the best of them. Institutional developments within the academic elite from the late nineteenth century onward reflect a prevailing assumption that scholarly excellence and religious affiliation and subscription stand in inverse ratio to one another. Many of our most distinguished private universities consequently maintain a studied distance from their points of origin. At Harvard, for example, the original motto of the university, *Veritas: Christo et Ecclesia*, has been abbreviated to the simple *Veritas*. That change indicates more than altered circumstances of ownership and control; it reflects as well a belief that the fullest pursuit of truth can only be conducted for its own, presumably secular, sake and not in the service of the church and its faith.

Universities that aspire to scholarly recognition must do so according to the prevailing norms and assumptions of academic life, which means that those schools that do so aspire, and yet want to take seriously their religious identification, operate under continuing burdens of suspicion and intellectual tension. Institutions that bear the label "Bible college" not as a term of dismissal but as a badge of honor—one thinks, say, of a Bob Jones University—experience no crises of identity or conflicts of purpose, but a Notre Dame (or a Valparaiso) lives with those crises and conflicts as inescapable conditions of existence. Such a university has to maintain an intricate balance in its dual nature as a community of inquiry and a community of conviction. Nor do these perpetual ambivalences exist only at a theoretical or abstract level. They come into play at every significant point of institutional decision making: shaping of curriculum, hiring of faculty, recruitment of students.

The precise manner and degree of intensity with which Christian colleges experience these tensions varies according to the particularities of the theological traditions with which they identify: evangelical Wheaton is not Catholic Notre Dame is not Lutheran Valparaiso. But in all cases the tensions exist. Athens and Jerusalem may not necessarily lie at opposite poles of the metaphorical world, but the respective imperatives and tendencies they suggest often pull in non-parallel directions. From the perspective of Jerusalem, the cosmopolitan lures of Athens continually tempt the Christian university to sacrifice its identity, its distinctive reason for being, while in the view from Athens, any university worthy of the name must transcend the varied provincialisms that

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Jerusalem imposes on it. If institutions had souls, that of the Christian university would be perpetually up for grabs.

III

I first encountered the metaphor of Athens and Jerusalem in the fall of 1956 when I enrolled as a freshman at Valparaiso University and fell under the rhetorical spell of its president, Otto Paul Kretzmann. O.P.—as he was universally known—utilized the metaphor not so much as an expression of dialectical tension as a triumphalist vindication of the University's existence. The Christian university, he regularly argued, stood at the *crossroads* of Athens and Jerusalem—a location not of tension or contradiction but of resolution—and it represented "the fusion of high learning and high religion." O.P. was a rhetorician, not a scholar, and the power of his presence led most of us, students and faculty alike, to overlook the elliptical leaps of argument that his oratory customarily obscured.

Not that it made all that much difference. The Valparaiso of the fifties experienced relatively little of the cosmopolitan/provincial strain because its aspirations to academic distinction were so modest. We struggled more for adequacy than for excellence.

To understand the Valparaiso of those days, one has to know something of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod out of which it grew. The LCMS developed from the experience of conservative German Lutheran emigrés to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century who reacted in dismay to the moralizing pietism and doctrinal laxity that, in their austere view, characterized the condition of American Lutheranism at the time. Theirs was a Lutheranism of strict commitment to the original Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century, and, behind the protective barriers of German language and culture, they preserved essentially intact until World War I the integrity of their beliefs within the uncongenial environment of liberal Protestant America.

The Americanizing pressures of the war experience forced the Missouri Synod out of its German-language cocoon. Its leaders sought assurance that the absorption of their children into the broader American culture would not signal the younger generation's departure from the faith of their fathers. College education offered in the Synod's view the potential occasion both for entry into the society's opportunities and for descent into its prevailing religious apostasy.

Thus the histories of the LCMS and of Valparaiso University intersected in 1925. The University had existed under various dispensations since 1859, but by the early 1920s it stood on the verge of academic and financial bankruptcy. A number of groups (including the Indiana Ku

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Klux Klan) expressed interest in acquiring the moribund institution, but it was finally a number of Missouri Synod pastors and lay people, organizing themselves as the Lutheran University Association (LUA), who purchased the school and set about operating, in the self-mocking words of one of its officers, "a freshwater college in northern Indiana." (It was to be of critical importance to the fate of the University that the LUA, though comprised entirely of LCMS members, was an independent association and not an official arm of the church; the University has through the years carefully guarded its independence and freedom from external control. It is a Lutheran university of Missouri Synod heritage, but it has no legal affiliation with any church body.)

The University barely managed to maintain itself during the late twenties and the Depression years. It gained accreditation, but that pretty much exhausted its academic achievements. It only began to emerge from scholarly obscurity after it appointed Dr. Kretzmann (the doctorate was honorary, not earned) as its president in 1940. It was during the Kretzmann years—he retired in 1968—that the University came to see itself not simply as a sanctuary from the larger American cultural scene but as itself a distinctive cultural force with the potential for making its presence felt in the wider world. President Kretzmann was at once deeply Lutheran and genuinely cosmopolitan. He was also a romantic of soaring and quite possibly foolhardy ambition who spoke of establishing a university of distinctiveness and distinction that would serve not simply as a servant to the church but as a rallying force for nothing less than a rebuilding of Christian civilization in America. Those of us who were his audience—half-mesmerized, half-skeptical—could never be sure how much of the dream he actually believed in himself. We wondered if he saw as clearly as we did—at least in our unbeguiled moments—the lack of fit between the vision and the resources at hand to make it reality.

It was only during O.P.'s periodic fits of rhetorical fancy that we at Valparaiso in the fifties dreamed of greatness. We were a pretty good school—the postwar educational boom had put the University on solid footing—and for the great majority of us that was good enough. Precise statistics aren't available, but a large proportion of undergraduates were first-generation college students. We were over 80 percent Lutheran, and if our parents had encountered higher education, it had as often as not been through the Missouri Synod's extensive system of training for pastors or parochial-school teachers. We were not, therefore, particularly critical judges of the education we received, which was probably just as well.

It is my quite undocumentable impression that the students of the time were on balance marginally superior to the men and women (there

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were relatively few of the latter) who taught them. While Valparaiso drew the majority of its students from the Great Lakes states, its status as the only comprehensive LCMS institution of higher education made it a national university. Within the Missouri Synod, Valparaiso represented in some ways what Notre Dame represented to Catholics, and so it attracted students who could, in a purely academic sense, have done better. A significant number of students in those days went on from the University, armed with national fellowships, to the leading graduate schools in the country.

This is not to say that we were a particularly striking academic lot. Middle-class, white (only a relative handful of blacks attended), aiming ourselves mainly at the middle reaches of American society, we fit tolerably well the stereotype of the Silent Generation that dominates memories of the college generation of the fifties. Our parents had sacrificed to send us to Valparaiso in hopes that we would find there adequate vocational preparation, dependable moral and theological training, and—if things worked out right—spouses of suitable religious and social compatibility. We did not by and large disappoint our parents' hopes. A minority of us fancied ourselves as intellectuals and critics of society, but our self-conscious rebellions from the orthodoxies of the Eisenhower era seldom carried us much beyond the boundaries of political or social respectability. Most of us came from the middle-to-lower margins of the middle class, and we had not yet enjoyed enough of the benefits of the American good life to strike out in principled rejection of it.

We received educations suitable to our ambitions. The faculty in those years was overworked and underpaid, competent but undistinguished. They were predominantly Lutheran and deeply committed to the idea of Christian higher education, though, with some notable exceptions, that commitment consisted more of tribal loyalty and devotion than of any very clear idea of the difference a Christian education should make. We were without any doubt a Christian community, but what made us, or should make us, a Christian *intellectual* community remained uncertain.

One could, with some care in selection of professors, receive a better than adequate education. My own degree of selectivity was perhaps extreme; I took seven courses from one instructor in history, six from another in political science. Both of these men were excellent teachers: informed, intellectually serious, concerned for the academic and personal development of their students. Neither they nor most of the rest of the faculty did much in the way of scholarly publication. One major reason was a punishing teaching load that left little time for research and writing. The Valparaiso of those years burned out a number of promising academic talents.

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For all of his concern with establishing the University's reputation, President Kretzmann seemed not fully to understand that a college that was purely a teaching institution would never make itself known in the way he wanted it known. He never, to be fair, had the resources at his disposal to provide his faculty the time and money needed for scholarly production, but neither did he ever set out seriously to make that a priority. One of the president's shrewdest critics—a man who left Valparaiso early in his career to establish a brilliant academic record elsewhere—argued that while O.P. was an intellectual of sorts, he never understood what it meant to be a scholar.

That may be an unduly harsh judgment. One has to measure O.P. against the cultural milieu out of which he came and within which he had to operate. The sturdy rural and village German-American constituency of the Missouri Synod had precious little in the way of cultural sophistication and virtually no understanding of the folkways of American higher education. Concepts of academic excellence or academic freedom had little meaning for people for whom, by and large, learning meant knowledge of the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions and to whom modernity was not something to be critically engaged but an enemy to be avoided when possible and otherwise taken on in unremitting combat. O.P. had little time or margin for concern for scholarly achievement in a context in which he spent extraordinary amounts of energy fending off complaints from parents that their children were being exposed to the teaching of evolution in biology classes and the historical-critical method in biblical studies—not to mention the temptations of dancing in their social lives (the joke had it that the LCMS was opposed to sex in the vertical position because it might lead to dancing). It may well be that O.P. did as much as he could with what he had to work with.

I should not make the Valparaiso of the fifties sound more provincial or limited than it was. Most of us there, students and faculty alike, kept a critical if affectionate distance from the more retrograde attitudes of the LCMS. Indeed, we imagined ourselves, with a certain touch of superiority, as the generation that would lead the Missouri Synod kicking and screaming into a necessary encounter with the modern world. We did not reject the LCMS, but we wanted to make it better than it was.

My student generation stood poised in a fascinating relation between past and present. Campus life remained conservative even by the unliberated standards of the time. Daily chapel attendance was still mandatory, at least for freshmen, and our social lives, while not oppressively restricted, were kept under wary supervision. The University exercised a flexible but unapologetic discipline of in loco parentis that most of us accepted without significant protest. At the same time, the Greek system flourished; most students joined fraternities or sororities

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and within them dabbled on occasion on the outer margins of social debauchery—which is to say, in the fraternities at least, that we drank a lot, a situation that the University, except when things periodically got out of control, decided more or less to ignore. We were, despite our urgings, sexually straight-laced for the most part (the double standard, which was very much in force, guaranteed that). We flirted with social rebellion, though seldom engaged in it, even as we toyed with intellectual heresies that we never fully embraced.

Most of us, when all was said and done, loved Valparaiso with an almost uncritical passion, or, better, a passion that forgave the place its faults. It gave us an experience of intimate community—the student body numbered a little more than two thousand—that allowed the possibility for criticism of the world out of which we had come even while, in the larger sense, it affirmed that world. If we had not, when we were done, undergone a splendid education, we had undergone a splendid college experience. My farewell editorial in the student newspaper expressed, I'm sure, the views of many other graduates as well: "For all that Valparaiso is we are grateful; for all that it is not we are still hopeful."

IV

After I graduated from Valparaiso in 1960, I spent more than two decades away—four years in American studies in the graduate school at Yale and seventeen years teaching American history at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Yale introduced me to a world of serious scholarship that I had never encountered before and to which I never fully adjusted. I wanted, on the model of my favorite professors at Valparaiso, to be a college teacher, and I remember hearing with a sinking feeling a history professor at Yale dismiss teaching as that which had to be endured in order to allow genuine academics to do their real work of scholarly research. That wasn't what I had thought I'd signed myself up for.

Queen's was a marvelous place, a university that expected and honored excellent teaching even as it also encouraged original research. It was and is, by any reasonable reckoning, one of the premier institutions of higher education in North America, a university at the forefront of scholarship that never forgets its responsibilities to undergraduates. When I left Queen's in 1981 to return to Valparaiso to teach American studies and political thought and to edit *The Cresset,* the University's journal of ideas and opinion, a number of colleagues pointed out that in moving to a less prestigious institution that would pay me less to work harder I was making something other than a canny career move.

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The university I came back to had not, during the time I'd been away, preserved itself in aspic. I had kept in touch with the place through alumni publications, correspondence with former professors and classmates who had returned to join the faculty, and, most closely, residence there during two separate sabbatical leaves during the 1970s. But there was a lot I had missed.

Most of all, I'd missed the sixties. As with so many other colleges and universities, as indeed with much of the society, Valparaiso experienced extraordinary turmoil and confusion in the late sixties and early seventies. (In remembering "the sixties," one needs to specify: very different images of the era come to mind depending on whether one is summoning up 1964 or 1967 or 1970.) For anyone who was not there, the meaning of the events of those years for the life of the University is very difficult to sort out. It used to be said that one's attitude toward the French Revolution provided as good a measure as any for identifying political ideology; for Americans of our era the sixties are taking on that litmus-test quality. And even as images of revolutionary France from the perspective of a Robespierre are unrecognizable from a Burkean view, so recollections of the sixties vary according to the predispositions observers bring to them. Best of times, worst of times: among those who went through the sixties at Valparaiso, one can find fervent takers for either category of judgment.

As elsewhere, the protests at Valparaiso had to do both with the University's internal governance and with events in the wider society. For some time, discontent had been building, first among faculty and later among students, concerning the system of (mostly) benevolent patriarchy by which the school operated. A series of reforms (or so most people saw them) transferred a measure of authority from the administration to the faculty and—to a lesser degree—the students, although Valparaiso never experienced anything like radical democratization. About the larger issues of the time, Vietnam above all, the University witnessed the range of protests customary to the age, culminating in the burning of the administration building following the movement of troops into Cambodia and the subsequent disturbances and shootings at Kent State in May 1970.

It would be misleading to leave the impression that Valparaiso went through a radicalizing process equivalent to that which occurred at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, or Berkeley. The University's protestors, by all accounts, were fewer in proportion, more amenable to reason, less bloody-minded, and less driven by a revolutionary political agenda. No SDS chapter ever appeared on campus, and everyone agrees that the torching of the administration building occurred at the hands of a few students who were very much on the margins of the undergraduate

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protest movement. (The official record of the University indicates that the arsonists were never identified, but there is a persistent and probably trustworthy oral tradition that insists they were located and quietly expelled.) Whatever precisely took place at Valparaiso during the sixties, its conservative Lutheran traditions kept it from becoming the prototypical protest college.

V

The most obvious thing to be noted about the university I returned to was that it was a better educational institution than the one I attended as an undergraduate. That improvement received resounding confirmation in the fall of 1987 in a poll of college presidents conducted by *U.S. News & World Report* that ranked Valparaiso first among the 137 schools included in its category of Midwestern and Western Comprehensive Institutions (one of nine categories of American colleges devised by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). No such poll existed when I was a student, but if it had, the Valparaiso of that day would not have topped it.

It may be that the component of the University that has improved the least in the past quarter century is the student body. Standard test scores have fluctuated within a relatively narrow range (better than average but not strikingly so), and the anecdotal impressions of the faculty appear to record no increase in quality. It was the predominant criticism of the fifties generation that we were, if not anti-intellectual, at least non-intellectual, and one endlessly encounters that same criticism at current faculty gatherings. (One reason for the nostalgia for the sixties on the part of some faculty is their impression that the students of those years displayed more intellectual liveliness than those that preceded or followed them; that may be, though one wonders if some of those faculty are not simply identifying intellectual acuity with a leaning toward political sympathies more congruent with their own than has normally been the case with Valparaiso students.)

Impressions aside, students of today differ from their predecessors in quite measurable ways. They are, to begin with, less Lutheran: only 50 percent, as compared with more than 80 percent in the late fifties. Roman Catholics in those days were exotics; today they constitute more than 20 percent of the student body. The shift in religious demographics coincides with an increase in numbers and a greater regional concentration. Valparaiso now enrolls between thirty-five hundred and four thousand students, and the increase has come substantially from the contiguous (that is, the Chicago suburban) area. While ours is still a national university in the sense that it draws students from everywhere in the

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nation, it relies more heavily on the regional neighborhood, and thus attracts a less religiously homogeneous population, than has traditionally been the case.

If the students are not so religiously (and ethnically) homogeneous as they once were, they are racially more so. Valparaiso never drew many blacks—black Lutherans are a relative rarity—and despite recruitment efforts draws fewer now than it used to. Although the city of Valparaiso (population 20,000–25,000) is within fifty miles of Chicago and thirty miles of Gary, it is itself virtually lily-white, and it does not provide an atmosphere in which black people feel easily at home. The proportion of blacks on the faculty is, if anything, even smaller than that among students.

When one turns to the faculty at large, the question of increase in quality is far less ambiguous than it is with students. The faculty of today has better credentials and is more published than ever before. It has made itself far more visible in academic circles than it had in the past. A few of my colleagues are among the national leaders in their fields; many more, especially the younger ones, lead active and productive scholarly lives, a considerable accomplishment considering the still-heavy teaching load at Valparaiso. Yet the general improvement in professional competence and intellectual energy has created problems for faculty morale that had not previously existed.

Traditionally, professors at Valparaiso were not expected to be more than good teachers and good university citizens, and those who fulfilled those expectations (and had earned their doctorates) could expect in the fullness of time to rise through the ranks to the status of full professor. That is no longer automatically the case. The University is a long way from establishing the publish-or-perish reign of terror under which professors at high-prestige institutions operate (at least until safely tenured), but those who do not publish have in recent years found the promotion ladder cut off at the rank of associate professor. Resentments build among people who feel they have had the rules of the game changed on them in mid-career, especially as they look about them at many senior faculty, also non-publishers, who got to be full professors under the old dispensation.

These discontents are most evident among the members of the College of Arts and Sciences, who lack the options open to disgruntled members of the professional colleges of the University. (In addition to arts and sciences, the University includes colleges of law, business administration, engineering, and nursing, as well as Christ College, the undergraduate honors college.) Lawyers, accountants, and electrical engineers have occupational alternatives open to them that professors of classical languages or history do not.

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That aside, arts and sciences faculty have been dismayed over a long-term decline in enrollments in their college relative to those elsewhere in the University, though in recent years those enrollments have stabilized and even begun to increase. Even within the arts and sciences, professors have had to endure the "new vocationalism" of the eighties that evidences less concern for classical liberal arts education than in the past (few liberal arts students any longer go on to graduate school) and more emphasis on one form or another of pre-professional training. The University insists on broad general education requirements in the arts and sciences in all its undergraduate professional programs, but liberal arts faculty members nonetheless occasionally feel relegated to the margins of the University's operations.

Part of the problem is self-generated by a tendency to misperceive the nature of the University. Liberal arts faculty are inclined to measure conditions at Valparaiso in comparison with other midwestern Lutheran schools such as St. Olaf or Wittenberg. But those schools are liberal arts colleges, while Valparaiso, as its designation in the *U.S. News* survey indicates, is a "comprehensive institution," which is defined as a college that offers half or more of its undergraduate degrees in professional or career-related fields. The tilt of the student population toward professional or vocational interests creates an educational atmosphere more practical, less "intellectual" than is the case at a typical liberal arts college. (It does not, despite widespread prejudices to the contrary, necessarily suggest a decline in academic ability; freshman engineering students at Valparaiso, for example, come in with higher SAT scores than do their counterparts in arts and sciences.)

It may well be that the career-oriented inclinations of the students account for a good part of the general conservatism of the place—intellectual, social, and political—about which so many of the faculty so frequently complain. One recalls, for example, the controversy that arose several years ago when the University awarded Edwin Meese (a Missouri Synod Lutheran) an honorary degree. At the commencement exercises, a quite visible minority of liberal arts students wore badges of protest and ostentatiously declined to applaud when Meese was introduced. (A large part of the liberal arts faculty had earlier signed a petition protesting the award.) The graduating engineers, by contrast, rose in virtual unanimity to give him an ovation. It seemed clear that their gesture was directed at least as much in disapproval at their fellow students as in approval at the then counsel to the president.

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the cultural tensions and discontents within the University. The student body remains highly cohesive overall, and most members of the faculty, whatever particular grievances they might harbor, are pleased to be part of an enterprise that

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has received public affirmation of its worth. Academics are a notoriously fretful lot, but those at Valparaiso probably exhibit less of that trait than most of their colleagues elsewhere.

VI

The question that remains is whether the University's improvement in quality has come at the expense of its distinctive identity and purpose, whether in traveling with some success the road to Athens it has had to sacrifice or minimize its attachments to Jerusalem.

Tensions do arise. As the faculty has improved, it has become more professionalized and more diverse. Scholarly professionals tend to direct their commitments and loyalties more to the disciplines in which they work than to the institutions at which they happen to do that work. Conditioned by graduate training to aspire single-mindedly to intellectual excellence, they resist suggestions by University administrators that in academic matters like hiring of new faculty anything other than scholarly promise should come into play. Intrusion into these areas of questions concerning religious commitment seems to them at best parochial and irrelevant, at worst a betrayal of the academic calling. This tendency cuts across lines of confessional subscription at Valparaiso, but it has become more prevalent as the percentage of Lutherans on the faculty has declined. (It is now about 50 percent.)

The University has no officially declared policy on the matter, although it appears in practice to operate on the principle that promising Lutheran academics should be assiduously sought out and, other things being equal, given preference. Those persons concerned that Valparaiso retain its Lutheran identity insist that the University must maintain a critical mass of Lutheran students and faculty alike. Views as to the necessary size of that mass vary, but most "Lutheran loyalists" would be unhappy if the figures dropped much below their current levels. Disagreements on this question, it should be noted, do not simply pit administrators against faculty; faculty opinion is itself sharply divided.

Except within its department of theology, the University imposes no religious tests on faculty, either for Lutheranism in particular or Christianity in general. Letters of appointment do state that "it is understood" that faculty are "sympathetic with the Christian intellectual tradition," though no one has specified what that tradition or sympathy with it entails. Complaints about non-Lutheran faculty being viewed as "second-class citizens" occasionally arise, but these appear to reside more in the subjective perceptions of those holding them than in actual differences in treatment (though non-Lutherans aspiring to the University

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presidency or even the vice presidency for academic affairs would presumably find their ambitions thwarted).

Lutheran theology has always made room for accommodation with secular forces in the culture so long as the essentials of the faith are neither compromised or endangered. In the realm of politics, for example, Luther himself is supposed to have said that it is better to be governed by a smart infidel than a stupid Christian. By analogy, most Lutherans can live comfortably with the idea that it is better to be taught almost anything (except possibly theology) by a competent unbeliever than by an earnest Christian who doesn't know what he's talking about. (Those alternatives, the University hopes, do not exhaust the field of possibilities.) Certainly Valparaiso takes great pride in those non-Lutheran (sometimes non-Christian) faculty members who are among its most distinguished teachers and scholars. Virtually no one on campus would argue—though some in the constituency might—that the University should, even if it could, turn itself into an exclusively Lutheran institution. The affirmation of intellectual pluralism does not consist merely in making a virtue of necessity.

Yet if the University wants to keep itself a certain kind of community, and if it wants to explore seriously the connections between Christianity and culture, it will have to remain populated by people for whom those are vital concerns and to whom insistence on scholarly excellence does not preclude loyalty to Christian faith in the Lutheran tradition. Those latter loyalties have been tested in recent years not so much by the tauntings of modernity—all of which are very old news by now and have come under considerable intellectual questioning themselves—as by developments within American Lutheranism, and the LCMS in particular.

During the late sixties and early seventies, the Missouri Synod tore itself apart in a series of doctrinal conflicts between conservatives and moderates (no one in Missouri would own up to being a liberal), with particular emphasis on the question of interpretation of the Bible. The conservatives—who insisted on a literal reading of Scripture—won decisively in a series of political fights at LCMS conventions that eventually resulted in an exodus of the moderates from the Synod, and that development caused significant problems for Valparaiso. The University remained officially neutral in the conflict, but opinion on campus, and certainly among the faculty, sided overwhelmingly with the moderates. Ever since the split, relations between the University and the church have been correct but cool. For the great majority of faculty, resumption of the former intimate ties with the LCMS—at least in its current manifestation—would be as undesirable as it is unlikely. Most faculty members concede the need to avoid open hostility, but that marks the limit of their desire to achieve accommodation.

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That leaves the University firm in its affirmation of Lutheran identity but uncertain about how institutionally to ground that identification. Much of non-Missouri American Lutheranism (including the band of former Missouri moderates) has recently amalgamated as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Many faculty members at Valparaiso urge the development of close ties to the new church, but the ELCA already has a large number of Lutheran colleges to which it owes support, and there is no realistic possibility that Valparaiso could find within it the secure home it once had within the LCMS. It is still predominantly to Missouri Lutheran individuals and congregations that the University has to look for support and for prospective students, although the number of non-Missouri Lutherans in the student body has increased in recent years.

All of which suggests the imminent possibility of the University drifting into isolation, its ties with its tradition considerably weakened and with no obvious alternative affiliations available. The potential crisis involves more than the matter of institutional church relations. The disillusionment over developments within the Missouri Synod has led some at Valparaiso to extend their skepticism about the Synod's manner of understanding Lutheranism to a more generalized suspicion of Lutheran particularity of any sort. Virtually no one at the University would suggest (at least publicly) that it shed its religious identity, but there is rather more sympathy for the view that the University concern itself less with its Lutheran tradition and more with ecumenical openness. That still represents a minority viewpoint, but it is bothersome to those who recall that in the history of religious higher education in America driftings toward non-denominational Christianity have typically served as way stations on the road to eventual secularization. Valparaiso is still by anyone's standards a Lutheran institution, but, for better or worse, it is less so than it once was.

A number of forces have converged at the University, then, not yet to sacrifice Jerusalem to Athens but at least to remind those for whom the matter counts that Valparaiso has no guaranteed immunity from the tides of history or from the forces that go into the making of cultural paradigms. If the University is to preserve its identity, it will have to become self-conscious about it in a way it has not done before, lest it give up being what it has been in a fit of absence of mind.

VII

The Vice President for Academic Affairs ends his remarks to the faculty not, as is customary on such occasions, on a note of high rhetorical resolution but with the cautionary reminder that Tertullian finally

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concluded that Athens and Jerusalem have precisely nothing to say to each other. We are committed to pursuing the conversation, he says, but we cannot be certain that things will turn out to be different with us.

He's right, I suspect, to avoid the grandiloquent. The intersections of Christianity and culture are elusive and indeterminate, and they occur for the most part on the tangent rather than head-on. The Lutheran intellectual tradition—which is not, as Lutheran ethics is sometimes said to be, a contradiction in terms—has seldom flirted with dreams of re-creation of the medieval synthesis, and it has always rejected the fundamentalist triumphalism that would "Christianize" everything it touches in society and culture.

But that is not to say that Christianity has nothing to say to the culture, including the intellectual culture. The meaning of Valparaiso as a Christian university should extend beyond the requirement that its students take a certain number of courses in theology or the availability of daily worship services (no longer mandatory for anyone) in the massive Chapel of the Resurrection that dominates the campus from its highest point. I think, for example, of some of my own preoccupations in research and teaching.

If I had to trace to a single source the presuppositions that have shaped my reflections on modern American political thought, it would be to Luther's observation that it is neither necessary nor possible to run the state by the gospel. That assumption, which originates in the traditional Lutheran two-kingdoms doctrine that holds in tension and paradox the imperatives of the kingdom of the left hand—the realm of creation, justice, and law—with those of the right hand—that of redemption, love, and grace—provides a distinctive approach to understanding politics and power that leaves room for moral judgment without easily descending into sentimental moralizing. Many Christians, including, these days, a good many Lutherans, think Luther was quite wrong on all this; and the majority of my colleagues at Valparaiso, I have discovered, resist with some vigor the political conclusions to which I have been led by his approach. But at least the University provides an environment where such explorations are encouraged and valued and within which the language and way of seeing things out of which they arise do not confront the incredulity and blank incomprehension they would come up against at most secular institutions.

I think as well of the course in political philosophy that I teach every spring. In the course I can, while carefully avoiding the proselytizing that I have always found alien to good teaching, at least suggest to my students conceivable alternatives to the naturalism and positivism that dominate modern culture and to which most of them have thoroughly, if quite unconsciously, subscribed. Most modern pedagogy proceeds, I am

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convinced, on assumptions about students' world views that are quite contrary to fact. Professors typically view the students who come to them from high school as incipient ideologues burdened with unexamined and premature certainties about the world out of which they have to be shaken through exposure to complexity and ambiguity. But that assumption fits only a handful of the students I encounter. Most of them are already mindless relativists whose automatic answer to all questions of truth or value is "It all depends on your point of view," and who need not so much to be shaken out of complacent certitudes as confronted with the possibility that there might possibly exist something dependable to be discovered on the far side of complexity and ambiguity. It is for them a revolutionary thought that Plato might be nearer to the reality of things than Hobbes.

Stanley Hauerwas has recently made an important point in this regard concerning the Socratic method that prevails in most university classrooms. That method of relentless questioning of all received truths, he notes, when dissociated from its founder's assumption that there do indeed exist truths to be discovered when all the questioning is done, leads not to the liberation of our youth but to their further intellectual and moral corruption. One needn't be a Christian to adopt this perspective, of course, but Christian faith does provide one of the few secure contemporary vantage points from which to take on the prejudices of modernity.

It is the irony of the situation of those who inhabit the Christian university today that they indulge in such fugitive and idiosyncratic reflections as these in full realization that they are unlikely in the extreme to have any significant effect in the larger culture. It is difficult under conditions of radical cultural pluralism to sustain illusions of a restored intellectual Christendom. I stay at Valparaiso University because I believe in it and I love it—it is, of all the places I have known, the one where I have most fully felt the reality of community—not because in remaining here I think I have enlisted on the winning side. But that's not really the point. T. S. Eliot had it right: for us there is only the trying; the rest is not our business.

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Washington Square

FREDERICK MORGAN

Late in the twenties when I was small
in breezy spring and sullen fall
I walked each day to Washington Square
to play with other children there:
  Paul, the minister's son,
  Laura who loved to run,
Benjamin with his costly toys,
and Sue, who said she hated boys.

Near the north entrance to the park
we'd meet at noon and play till dark
wide-ranging through those endless hours
as though all time and space were ours—
  for when we five combined
  we paid the hours no mind
so dazzled were we by the maze
of wonders opening to our gaze.

Each day that passed revealed a world—
a landscape secretly unfurled
to our five pairs of eyes alone.
As king or queen each ruled his own
  in turn, day after day,
  in strict sequence and sway,
and fixed its boundaries and decreed
the laws which all the rest must heed.

For justice governed all our play:
no single passion might outweigh

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the claims of all to equal share
in treasure unforeseen and rare.
  And so we roamed at ease
  through joyful seigneuries,
each vassal proven by the sword
loyal to Lady or to Lord.

I still recall those ancient games!—
the talismans, the secret names,
the questing knights and demoiselles
the wizards weaving crafty spells,
  and best of all our fair
  strong fortress-castle, where
tired and exultant, friend by friend,
we met at each adventure's end.

So the weeks passed—until one day
when I arrived at noon to play
near the great Arch, at the usual place,
I found no welcoming form or face:
  no comrade had appeared.
  I waited, watched, and feared—
then wandered, aimlessly alone,
up and down those paths of stone.

This was a world, it seemed, this bare
immensity where here and there
dim random shapes loomed into view—
this was the world that strangers knew.
  I, its frailest part,
  received it from the start
as closer to the quick of things
than all our brave imaginings.

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I stared straight up at the pale sky
where hulks of cloud went drifting by
and knew myself alone and pure.
"Whatever comes, you shall endure,"
  a voice spoke inwardly,
  a voice not strange to me.
I tracked my hand across my face
and felt the world shift in its place.

Next day all seemed restored. My four
good friends returned—we roamed once more,
releasing brighter energies
as though we'd found new selves to please.
  Thus other months sped by
  and seasons changed, as I,
aware that all must pass away,
lived on intensely day to day.

Comrades!—how has life served you all?
Benjy grew up a drunkard, Paul
was killed in Normandy, and Sue
moved somewhere west, was lost from view.
  Sweet Laura, first to go,
  died of the polio
in '33—my love, aged ten.
Sometimes I wish you back again,

the four of you, just as you were,
triumphant in that eager stir
of childhood—and myself with you
as I was then . . . But it won't do.
  No dream of holding fast
  to a beloved past

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can cloud the heads of those who know
what's dead is dead, and rightly so.

Children still play in Washington Square
but they don't roam free, they must beware—
gone is their ancient liberty.
Gone, too, that civic decency
  which cherished old and young
  who shared the common tongue.
America bows to new, weak gods;
its children play against the odds.

Laura, Benjamin, Paul and Sue,
you've gone your ways. I'm going, too.
Our early joys were dearly bought—
the world was never what we thought—
  and yet, we're justified:
  it wasn't we who lied.
Now leave me, friends, and leaving, bless.
Once more I face the emptiness.

FREDERICK MORGAN is co-editor of the *Hudson Review*. His most recent book is *Poems: New and Selected*, published by the University of Illinois Press. "Washington Square" is the seventh winner of the Mary Elinore Smith Poetry Prize. The $200 prize is given in memory of Miss Smith by her family and friends. Mary Elinore Smith, who died in 1981, was an editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

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Jean & Joe

The Stafford-Liebling Marriage

DAVID ROBERTS

AT THE BEGINNING OF 1956, Jean Stafford was forty years old. A self-described "rube" from Colorado, she had fled east after college, never to return. In 1940, at the age of twenty-four, she had married a young, unknown poet named Robert Lowell. Four years later Stafford saw her first published novel, *Boston Adventure*, become a runaway best-seller; overnight she became famous. Lowell, whom Stafford deeply if quixotically loved, revealed himself in private life to be a spoiled bully. In 1946, after he began an affair right before her eyes, Lowell and Stafford separated. In bitter distress, on the verge of a breakdown, Stafford committed herself to Payne Whitney Clinic in New York, where she stayed for almost a year.

Jean Stafford married again in 1950. The marriage, with a *Life* magazine editor named Oliver Jensen, was, as both soon came to realize, a mistake. By 1956, Stafford was living alone once more, in Westport, Connecticut. Her health, which had been poor since college, was worse than ever, and the drinking problem she had had for twenty years was becoming serious.

In 1952, Stafford had published her third novel, *The Catherine Wheel*. Although she would live for another twenty-seven years, she never came close to finishing another novel. Throughout the early 1950s, she produced splendid short stories for *The New Yorker*: her *Collected Stories* would eventually win the Pulitzer Prize. But by 1956, she was beginning to find fiction of any kind increasingly difficult to write.

That summer, Stafford rented a one-room flat in Belgrave Square in London. One of her motives may have been sheer avoidance of the novel she was working on; another was the urge to sail out in search of new adventures to give her something to write about. For the rest of her life,

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Stafford would claim that every trip she took turned into a travel nightmare exceeded in its miseries only by the one that followed. Her Atlantic crossing on the *Mauretania* in June was "a monstrous, a really cruel bore"; by her arrival in London she had bronchitis. The flat, rented sight unseen, was a disaster:

> The only place I've ever been that was worse was an army billet in Nurnberg. The service does not exist, the porters are fiends, the light is much too dim for a bat, *and* now they have started building something on a bomb site just beyond my wall and I am told that the pneumatic drills will go on for several years.

To add to her distress, she lay in bed day after day, accomplishing no writing. "I'd forgotten," she wrote her friend Joan Stillman, "that after the age of twenty-two, the search for experience is narrowing and harrowing."

The London summer, however, turned out to be pivotal in Stafford's life. By chance, she met Eve Auchincloss, an American editor also visiting London. During the course of a first evening together, the women "got good and plastered" and developed an "instant friendship" that would last for two decades. For much of that time, Auchincloss was probably Stafford's best friend and also did more than any other person to keep Stafford in print after 1957.

In her most motherly mode, Katharine White, Stafford's editor at *The New Yorker,* had arranged for her to meet various writers in London, including the magazine's London correspondent Mollie Panter-Downes and the English novelist Elizabeth Taylor. White also pushed Stafford to meet A. J. Liebling, who had written for *The New Yorker* since 1935, and who had been living abroad for the past year and a half. "We found him the best sort of companion," White wrote to Stafford.

> He is a strange man; often it is next to impossible to get into conversation with him some people think. But he smiles like a Buddha and when he does talk, it is very good indeed. He is a gourmet, who knows the best and least obvious places to eat, and he takes a gusty delight in the English music-hall humors and entertainments. I am very fond of him & I've written him a note to look you up.

Stafford happened to be in *The New Yorker* London office one day when Liebling telephoned. He asked to have her put on the line, then invited her to tea at his hotel. Each knew, and was deeply impressed by, the other's writing. At their first meeting, Stafford was "awfully, awfully timid. . . . I'd been reading him for years." For his part, Liebling considered Stafford—and had told friends he considered her—the best living writer of English.

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In July 1956 "Joe" Liebling, as his friends called him, was fifty-one. He was bald-headed, bespectacled, and, at five feet nine-and-a-half inches and 243 pounds, enormously fat. At the tag end of a disastrous marriage to his second wife, from whom he was separated, he had been "lunging" at women all summer. Instead of lunging at Stafford, he wooed her—taking her to the racetrack in a hired Rolls Royce, squiring her around the low-life bars of the city, and having suits custom-made for her. He also arranged, despite a booked-solid London, for her to leave her noisy Belgrave flat and move into a room in Duke's Hotel, where he was staying. Liebling was the perfect distraction for Stafford during this unproductive summer; she luxuriated in his doting company.

Stafford returned to the U.S. on the *Queen Mary* at the beginning of October. It took her only a few months to make her getaway from Westport. It was the town's "galloping contemporaneity," she wrote, "that made me retreat, exhausted, to the stately, old-fashioned ways of life in New York." By the end of January 1957, she was installed in an apartment on East Eightieth Street, just off Fifth Avenue.

There were new pleasures for Stafford in New York. With Joseph Mitchell, Liebling's good friend at *The New Yorker,* she went botanizing in Central Park, the Bronx Botanical Garden, and the Moravian cemetery on Staten Island. She saw much of Eve Auchincloss, who gave her assignments for *Harper's Bazaar.*

Auchincloss paints an incisive portrait of Stafford during this period.

> She had a sort of squarish, shapeless body. At forty-one, she wasn't beautiful. Her head was often cocked to one side, with her eyebrows drawn up in a pleading sort of expression. She had very big hands and feet. Her hands were slightly shaky, as she would guide a cigarette to her lips. Her hair was lusterless, permanented in a funny frizz. It sat on top of her head as if it might easily be blown off.
>
> Her voice was low and slow, and it got slower over the years. Jean always searched for the perfect word or phrase. She would keep you a little in suspense, then deliver the goods. She was *very* funny. No matter how boozed up she was, she always planned her way from the beginning of a sentence to the end.

A. J. Liebling had stayed on in London, but he wrote often, puncturing his newsy dispatches with outbursts of self-conscious flirtation: "I seem to have held a very great lady in my arms at all those race meetings. It was a very great honor!" In January 1957 he made a two-week visit to New York, staying at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. During that brief time, Liebling and Stafford were all but inseparable.

By May 1957, the novel Stafford was supposed to deliver to Random House was two years overdue. And her stories were more and more often being rejected by *The New Yorker.* A whole collection of hypotheses

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could be invented to explain Stafford's new difficulties in writing fiction. It would be blinking at the facts, however, not to consider the role alcohol must have played in Stafford's decline. By 1957 she was drinking more heavily than ever. And, as had been true on and off for at least fifteen years, she often combined nonstop imbibing with going days without food. A loss of appetite is, of course, one of the common side effects of alcoholism. But in view of a number of traits Stafford had shown since childhood—her labeling by her mother as a "problem feeder," the rage she felt when her sisters teased her about her imaginary fatness, her vivid disgust at all kinds of food—it may be germane to consider the possibility that Stafford had a tendency toward anorexia.

Under the exhortations of a host of doctors and therapists, Stafford had often tried to go on the wagon. But sobriety never held a lasting grip on her. She was not conspicuously shamed by her drinking; she could, in fact, be jaunty about it, telling a close friend in the early 1950s, " 'It's gotten so that my bathwater smells of Old Fashioned.' "

In her twenties, Stafford had been able to drink sherry all day and still turn out four thousand words of *Boston Adventure*. At forty-one, she was no longer so resilient. The true depth of her drinking problem was revealed to a few close friends. One such friend was Joseph Mitchell:

> I would get a telephone call from her, over in Grand Central. She would be having auditory hallucinations from her hangover. She'd be standing in that huge open space, hearing voices that said, "Jean Stafford. Jean Stafford." She'd call and ask, would I come and get her? I'd say, try to tell me where the telephone booth is. So I would come over, and she'd be shaking. I would usually get her up to the Cosmopolitan Club, and we'd have lunch, and she would gradually get command of herself.

Eve Auchincloss witnessed an even more disturbing scene:

> She called me very early one morning, and that was peculiar, because Jean wasn't awake early in the morning. She asked me to come up [to her apartment on East Eightieth]. I found the living room floor covered with bottles. She was in the bedroom. She talked kind of rationally—she had some plausible explanation for the bottles—but she was telling me that there were animals and slimy things crawling on the walls. She was having an attack of the d.t.'s. I stayed until the doctor came.

By 1957, Jean Stafford needed to be rescued. It was A. J. Liebling who threw her a life preserver.

Liebling was a legendary figure in American journalism. During his twenty-two years of writing for *The New Yorker*, he had appropriated certain subjects as his own. His profiles of urban low-life figures—

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freelance Broadway promoters operating out of phone booths, carnival hucksters, and grandiloquent con men like Colonel Stingo, whom Liebling made famous—were the envy of a generation of magazine writers. No one ever wrote about the boxing scene with greater insight. His impassioned critiques of his own profession, appearing under *The New Yorker* rubric "The Wayward Press" (a department invented by Robert Benchley), did much to elevate the standards and ethics of reporting in this country. Though not a food writer, Liebling celebrated the joys of haute cuisine and gluttony alike. He had a lifelong love affair with France and seized any excuse to visit and write about that country. During World War II, at great personal risk, he had covered for *The New Yorker* the fall of Paris, the Normandy invasion, and finally the Paris liberation.

Born in Manhattan, Liebling had spent most of his life there. The son of a furrier, he had been raised in a liberal, nominally Jewish family. When he got kicked out of Dartmouth for cutting chapel too often, he talked his father into subsidizing a blissful year in France. Thereafter he knuckled down to a series of jobs as a newspaper reporter. In New York he worked for the *Times*, the *World*, and the *World-Telegram* before hooking up with Harold Ross's *The New Yorker* in 1935.

Liebling was as prolific as he was eloquent. Without irony, his biographer, Raymond Sokolov, cites as proof of the decline of Liebling's powers the fact that in the last three years of his life he wrote only sixty-two articles. Brendan Gill noted that Liebling's confidence in his own writing was "unbounded": "More than once, I would encounter him seated at his typewriter, staring at a sentence on the sheet of paper in front of him and chuckling—bouncing, joggling—with satisfaction."

The brilliant reporter had, however, been unlucky in love. At the age of twenty-nine he had married a beautiful but uneducated movie-theater cashier. She turned out to be schizophrenic and alcoholic, and Liebling had to hospitalize her several times. He divorced her in 1949 but continued unstintingly to write to her and to send her money. Sokolov believes that Liebling's first wife remained the true love of his life, and in her own befuddled way she returned his love. When she heard of Liebling's death, she tried to attend his memorial service but failed to locate the funeral chapel. Five months later she was found drowned in a river, her handbag and a half-empty bottle of wine abandoned on an adjacent dock.

Liebling's second wife, Lucille Spectorsky, also a beauty, was a twice-divorced high-school dropout and sometime model. The marriage turned bad almost at once, as Lucille showed her true colors. Sokolov writes:

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She held Liebling in thrall, played on his physical passion for her, milked him for the furs and dresses he, with his compulsion to put women on gilded pedestals, could never refuse her. She also milked him for all his growing fame as a *New Yorker* writer was worth. Because of him, her life turned into a literary salon. But then she tired of him.

In 1955, to take advantage of a twenty-thousand-dollar tax break for writers living abroad, Liebling moved to London. At the last minute Lucille backed out, using the move to force a separation. On her own in Nevada, she continued to live off her husband's earnings. During the 1950s, Liebling earned as much as sixty thousand dollars a year, but he was always broke. His chronic indebtedness was partly a consequence of his prodigal generosity: besides supporting Lucille and sending money to his first wife, he paid for his stepdaughter, Susan Spectorsky, to go to Radcliffe for four years, then gave her a year abroad at his expense in the country of her choice.

Despite a certain naiveté about romance, Liebling was experienced with women. During his separations he had conducted a number of affairs, and in Paris, even as a youth, he had unblushingly made weekly resort to prostitutes. When he began to court Jean Stafford, in his early fifties, he was not well. A lifelong penchant for overeating lay at the root of all of Liebling's medical complaints. By 1956 he was suffering badly from gout and kidney stones and was beginning to show signs of serious kidney, liver, and heart trouble as well. He made radical attempts to diet but these always quickly failed.

For Stafford, Liebling's attractions were manifold. Intellectually he was the equal of Robert Lowell, though two more different minds could scarcely be imagined. He treated her like a queen, buying her a mink stole and picking her up in a hired Rolls Royce—the antithesis of Lowell's behavior toward her. Temperamentally Stafford and Liebling were attuned. He was a strong liberal who had spoken out fiercely against fascism and the red-baiting of the McCarthy era.

Jean's new friend, moreover, was sympathetic to psychoanalysis, having himself sought the counsel of several therapists over the years. Liebling deeply admired Stafford's prose and did everything he could to encourage her to write. Perhaps most important of all, he relished good wine and strong drink; there would be few complaints about her alcohol intake from Joe Liebling's corner.

Romantically, Liebling's Achilles' heel was his obesity. Some of Stafford's best friends found him so unattractive that it was hard for them to understand her interest in the man. "He was so ugly, and fat, and greasy-looking. I couldn't get over anybody being in the same bed with that greaseball," says Ann Honeycutt, who had been James Thurber's mistress. Liebling was, in Eve Auchincloss's view, "obscenely fat"; he "wore his pants below the belly."

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In her mildly perverse way, Stafford agreed with her friends. "Not the least of Joe's attractions for her was that he was not good-looking," remembers Eileen Simpson. "He was 'positively ugly,' [Jean] said with girlish delight."

After his two-week visit to New York in January 1957, Liebling returned to London. During the next few months he traveled through the Near East, turning out pieces for *The New Yorker* on the Arab-Israeli conflict. By mail, he courted Stafford more fiercely than ever. Determined to divorce Lucille, he was able to win from her at first only a legal separation. As early as December 1956, he had already unambiguously declared his passion for Stafford:

> I want you to write because you're a great woman, and I love what you write, and because you'll never be happy—for more than one afternoon or one night at a time—unless you do yourself justice. I'll not give you up, and I'll combine things to have you together with me as soon as possible, and I'll make love to you as much as I want, which is certainly as much as you'll want, and we'll see wonderful things together and mortise our minds like the rest of us.

Katharine White, delighted at the match she had made, exhorted Stafford to join Liebling once more in London. In September 1957 Jean crossed the Atlantic, to be met by her suitor at Southampton. Liebling's chivalry delighted her: they drove all the way to London in a chauffeured Rolls, pausing during the "supremely sunny, rose-smelling day" for a picnic of caviar, cheese, and red wine. "I longed for my first taste of flattish, warmish English lager" she noted, "so we stopped at a pub called The Catherine Wheel."

At Duke's Hotel, Stafford took a separate room. That autumn—an extremely happy but unproductive time for her—passed in a dizzy round of racetrack afternoons and dressy evening dinners. Stafford spent six days in Belgium at an international congress of poets,

> all speaking unheard-of languages such as Frisian and Estonian and the worst of all, French. This was held in a gambling casino and I went along for the laughs and the material. Also I learned roulette and got so good the last night that one of the croupier's impassive stares broke into a look of rage.

The casino, but not the congregation of poets, served as the setting for her story "The Children's Game."

In November the couple returned to New York. Stafford kept her apartment on East Eightieth Street as her official domicile for another two months, but in the meantime she moved into the Fifth Avenue Hotel, just north of Washington Square, with Liebling. Throughout 1958

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he maintained a suite on the sixteenth floor while she had a pair of rooms on the sixth.

Sokolov assumes that Stafford kept separate quarters both in London and in New York as a "thin fiction of chastity" while Liebling was trying to pry a divorce out of the recalcitrant Lucille. It may well be, however, that it was Jean's need for autonomy and privacy that dictated this arrangement, more than her instinct for discretion. It is not clear how physically amorous the relationship was. To Oliver Jensen (to whom, of course, it would have been politic for Stafford to minimize the affair) she said "something like, she found it comfortable to be with this nice, friendly, jolly, old, fat, and brilliant writer. She indicated it was a comfortable arrangement, rather than a romance."

Even after Liebling's divorce came through, he and Stafford took their time about getting married. "We kept getting too busy to get married," Stafford later explained to Sokolov. The wedding took place on April 3, 1959, in a routine civil ceremony at New York City Hall. In lieu of a reception, the couple repaired to Tim Costello's, Liebling's favorite bar, where they held "a sort of open house in the saloon's upstairs room." Mr. and Mrs. Abbott Joseph Liebling moved into a roomy and luxurious apartment at 43 Fifth Avenue—by far the fanciest place in New York City that Jean had ever inhabited.

Marriage gave Stafford a host of new distractions from her work. With the aid of a black maid who also cooked, the Lieblings threw frequent dinner parties. They spent summer weeks in the country. Liebling bought season tickets to the Metropolitan Opera, on the theory that "it would make them feel grown up." He took her to a bar near Stillman's Gym and introduced her to prizefighters and trainers. As Stafford later told Sokolov, "His pleasure in everything was so contagious you couldn't help having a good time."

Instead of pursuing her own muse, Stafford fed Liebling ideas. Although he had already published ten books, Liebling was seized with the conviction that his work was ephemeral. The books had for the most part been woven-together collections of magazine pieces; as a youth, however, Liebling had planned to write immortal novels, and now he longed to find a subject suitable for a full-length book of nonfiction.

Stafford suggested Earl Long, the governor of Louisiana, who had just begun to show bizarre signs of mental aberration. The match was perfect: the flamboyant, reckless governor (Huey Long's younger brother) was the apotheosis of all of Liebling's low-life eccentrics. In the summer of 1959, the master reporter cornered and charmed the governor in the midst of his campaign for re-election; Stafford gladly tagged along. The book that resulted, *The Earl of Louisiana*, is considered by many to be Liebling's masterpiece.

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In late August, Stafford, Liebling, and Susan Spectorsky sailed for England on the *Media*, the latter on her way to the postgraduate sabbatical in Egypt that her doting stepfather was financing. Liebling planned to cover the upcoming British election for the London *Observer*, and Stafford was on her own assignment—the most bizarre of her career. As she later described its genesis,

> On a winter night, I dreamed these words: "Look anywhere and you will find roots. Samothrace. Gadopolis." It was then revealed to me, through an intelligence existing outside me in the upper air, rather like a disembodied history professor, that my Scotch ancestors had arrived at the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde only in the seventeenth century and that they had come there by a circuitous route from Samothrace. There was the further proposition, parenthetical and ambiguous as if the hour were nearly up and the professor had begun to nod, that these ambitious travelers had not been indigenous to Samothrace but had only paused there for some centuries en route to Britain from their native Turkey. My spectral informant trailed off then without documenting this arresting footnote and I woke up to see fine snow falling among the finials of the First Presbyterian Church across Fifth Avenue. . . . I memorized the dream for re-ex[am]ination in the morning and then went back to sleep.

Stafford had long been interested in dreams: she had read Freud's work on the subject, and since 1940 in Baton Rouge she had made a habit of writing down sketchy synopses of her own most interesting dreams. But this was the first (and only) time in her life that she acted upon a dream as if it were genuinely prophetic and revelatory.

While Liebling covered the election, Stafford traveled to the Isle of Arran. As background for her quest, she had corresponded with her sisters and with her Missouri cousins on her mother's side, searching her family's living memory for details of the McKillops' ancestry. She had apparently talked *The New Yorker* into paying for the trip, on the promise of an essay about her adventures.

On Arran itself she got nowhere. Despite her meager results, Stafford was full of enthusiasm. "If I don't get a story out of this," she wrote her agent, "I'm not and never have been a writer." As soon as he had finished covering the election, the ever-indulgent Liebling flew with his wife to Athens; from there they made their way to Samothrace.

On the island itself she found nothing to confirm her dream. If the level-headed Liebling regarded the whole journey as a wild-goose chase, he kept his feelings to himself. To James Oliver Brown, who had become his agent as well as Jean's, he wrote, "She should have some great New Yorker pieces, and perhaps a book, out of her Arran-Samothrace adventures."

It is tempting to see the Samothrace business as a self-conscious bagatelle Stafford concocted to avoid the demands of the novel she was

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unable to face. Yet her notes and letters betray an utter sincerity about the quest. In psychological terms it seems poignant that, after decades of erecting a self-protective "edifice" against her family, she should suddenly awaken to such a need to discover everything she could about her ancestral origins.

During the years of her marriage to Liebling, as Stafford later told Sokolov, "I was *extremely* unproductive. It was a source of woe to Joe. I could never figure out why it happened. Perhaps it's too simple an explanation, but I was happy for the first time in my life. He thought that if I wasn't writing, it meant I was unhappy with him." This *is* too simple an explanation. Stafford in fact did try to write, sometimes with great diligence, during the Liebling years. Yet many of her efforts, for one reason or another, went awry.

Liebling's affluence had saved Stafford from her financial doldrums. Thanks to her good reputation and to her agent's able promotion, after 1957 there was a steady flow of inquiries and assignments. The BBC showed interest in airing a radio dramatization of her novel *The Mountain Lion*; the producers of Alfred Hitchcock's TV show wanted to render her story "The Warlock" (she turned them down). In 1959 *Horizon*, which was edited by Oliver Jensen's former partner, Joseph Thorndike, hired her to interview the aged Isak Dinesen. Stafford received the baronness at the Cosmopolitan Club, where, if the bar tabs she submitted to the magazine are any indication, one or both of the women got completely smashed. Dinesen annoyed Stafford by confusing her with Shirley Jackson, the author of the famous short story "The Lottery." Even so, the profile Stafford wrote is uncharacteristically star-struck: " . . . I can imagine that she once moved through all her landscapes with a lithe and watchful speed, her great, dark, prompt eyes missing nothing."

Holiday asked Stafford to expound on "New England Summer," as a companion piece to her 1954 essay on winter. Despite an offer of fifteen hundred dollars plus expenses, she said no. *Harper's Bazaar* persuaded her to write on whiskey, *Redbook* on Christmas in Colorado. For *Mademoiselle* she wrote a beguiling memoir of the 1930s, called "Souvenirs of Survival." In 1960 her editor at *Horizon*, still enchanted with her work, appointed her that magazine's film critic. She turned out six columns for five hundred dollars each, only four of which were published. As always, there are memorable sentences in these reviews, but when confronted with such serious works as *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Pather Panchali*, Stafford was out of her depth. She knew no vocabulary for film criticism; instead she compared movies to desserts: "Like baklava, *Hiroshima* is filling; unlike baklava, it did not satisfy me."

Evidently swayed by Stafford's new credentials, *Harper's Bazaar*

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sent her to Reno to report from the set of John Huston's movie *The Misfits*. She wrote to Robert Hightower: "I was flown out (splendidly) and put up (shabbily) by the concern involved in perpetrating this appalling matter, and a good thing, too, because if I'd had to pay a cent I'd have sued like a shot. I was there for six days and returned with a lifetime of squalid memories." The magazine paid for her essay but never published it; she gave a different version of the piece to *Horizon*, which also never ran it. By early 1961 Thorndike had realized that Stafford was not a film critic; he eased her out of the job and installed John Simon in her place.

Even as she was turning down lucrative offers from *Holiday*, Stafford was writing book reviews, for as little as $125, for such magazines as *The Reporter* and *The Griffin*. One of these efforts, which appears to have been written "on spec," was a savage attack on a first novel called *The Fume of Poppies*, by Jonathan Kozol, a syrupy tale of first love at Harvard and on the Continent. Stafford seized upon Kozol's unfortunate predilection for talking about food and love in the same breath, ridiculing the novel's self-satisfied couple in a piece entitled "The Eat Generation." The review is the first pure example of Stafford's work in a style of which she would become a master: the invective. Swiftian though the mockery is, it so tramples the unimportant object of its scorn—nothing more than a mediocre first novel—that Stafford found it all but impossible to place the essay. *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *Saturday Review*, and *Mademoiselle* all rejected it before it was finally taken by *The Reporter*.

To make quick cash, Stafford gave talks at universities, even though she hated speaking in public as much as ever. Yet at the same time she turned down chances for much larger paychecks. One feeler came from a surprising source: Gertrude Buckman, Delmore Schwartz's former wife, with whom Robert Lowell had had his love affair in 1946, now an editor at Harcourt, Brace and World, who suggested that Stafford "do for American eccentrics what Edith Sitwell did for English." In 1961 the State Department invited Stafford to go to Pakistan and India for several months, presumably as part of a cultural program under the new Kennedy administration. She stayed home.

During the four and a half years of her marriage to Liebling, Stafford published only one short story: "The Scarlet Letter," which came out in *Mademoiselle* after being rejected by seven other magazines. It is extremely hard to date Stafford's manuscripts, but there is good evidence that between 1958 and 1963 she wrote a few additional stories and gave up on several others short of completion. Two of Stafford's most interesting failures are titled "Bobette" and "Venus." The first, set in a catty social milieu very like Westport, hinges on the disruptive effect of Bobette, a brainless femme fatale whom one of the regulars brings as his

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date. Out of envy and malice, the others tease and bait her, to no effect. "Venus" is based on the unexpected visit paid by a former college classmate from Colorado to a New York protagonist (essentially Stafford). The protagonist has no recollection of Marjean, who now lives in Tulsa; Marjean, however, has forgotten nothing from her college days.

On the evidence of these manuscripts, it would appear that in the late 1950s Stafford was developing a new skill in her short fiction. The most impressive thing in "Bobette," "Venus," and "Treasures of Use and Beauty" is Stafford's perfect ear for the idiosyncratic patois of a trio of eccentric female antagonists—Bobette, Marjean, and Mrs. Mulgrew. Marjean's idioms are pure midwestern college girl, circa 1935, and it is a dazzling feat that Stafford was able to retrieve them intact from her auditory memory. Yet this very virtuosity threatens to take over the stories, attenuating their plots. In other cases there are simply too many minor characters.

This is not, however, an adequate explanation of Stafford's troubles with the short story after 1957. The much-rejected "Scarlet Letter," the unpublished "Venus" (turned down by *Good Housekeeping* and the *Saturday Evening Post)*, and the likewise unpublished "Treasures of Use and Beauty" (which may be the story alluded to by Katharine White as twice rejected by *The New Yorker)* are the equal of all but the very best of Stafford's earlier tales. All three are quite superior to many stories of hers that *The New Yorker* was happy to publish in the early 1950s. A good part of the blame for Stafford's decline as a commercially successful short-story writer can be attributed to changing literary fashion. During the 1960s American fiction would be shaped by the confessional intimacy of Philip Roth and John Updike, by the technical experiments of Donald Barthelme and John Barth, by the Jewish ethical broodings of Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow. Placed beside the work of such writers, Stafford's writing began to seem old-fashioned.

It was a characterization she consciously embraced. Speaking at the University of North Carolina in 1960, Stafford inveighed against the idea of creation as personal catharsis: "I hate writing that seems to have been undertaken for the purpose of therapy, and I do not believe that it is possible to get rid of a grief or a guilt or an ugly memory by writing of it." Flying in the face of the notions of the day, she laid down her manifesto:

> The life of a writer is an unceasing and daring pilgrimage and no one who is timid of adventure or of risk should undertake the hardships of the odyssey. It is not an aimless ramble like those engaged in by Mr. Kerouac's maudlin hoboes, but it is a journey with a mission—the search for an original grail of excellence and price. It is, in Henry James's phrase, "the act of life."

Yet if Stafford had the courage to resist the trends and tides of her craft, she did not have the steadfast self-confidence of a traditional writer

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such as her friend Peter Taylor. After 1963 she seems to have made little effort to write short stories at all.

Many who were close to Stafford between 1959 and 1963 feel that those years with Liebling were the most joyful of her life. In E. B. White's view, "The greatest thing Joe Liebling ever did was to marry Jean Stafford. He made her deliriously happy. . . ." Eve Auchincloss recalls, "He had his love affair with France, boxing, horse racing. These things appealed to the tomboy in her." Wilfrid Sheed anatomizes the partnership most memorably:

> Liebling, with his wise-cracking Grand Manner, seems to have opened windows for her and let out some terrors. He was the kind of guy who hired a taxi all the way from eastern Long Island to Manhattan during some paltry train strike: strictly a caviar man, and a funny one. And she was fine for him, with her earthy laugh, her quick-take for the bizarre, and her noble, toughened countenance. A reporter's moll, a kid you could take anywhere.

Liebling's pride in Stafford's excellence as a writer was prodigious. The consummate reporter told his friends that Jean would make a good reporter herself, with her talent for drawing people out. Howard Moss, the poetry editor of *The New Yorker*, bumped into Liebling one day in the elevator at the magazine's offices. Moss, who had just read a manuscript of Stafford's, told Liebling how good he thought it was.

> "I know," he said, "I wish you'd tell her."
>
> "I *have*," I said. And added, "I wish I could write prose like *that*. . . ."
>
> Joe, about to get off at his floor, turned to me and said, "I wish *I* could. . . ."

After the summer of 1960, however, the marriage was not as close as it had been. "As time went on," writes Sokolov, who had the benefit of Stafford's testimony, "their lives ran increasingly on separate tracks. Jean was not eager to see many of Joe's old friends. . . . She tired of racing. And she began to re-ally herself with some of the literary figures she had known before her marriage to Liebling." Eve Auchincloss remembers, "Liebling would come home, find Jean with me drinking, and look disgusted. Jean said he hated intellectuals. I couldn't figure out why he thought I was one."

Eventually Stafford revised her appraisal of her husband's magnanimity: "Quite often he does object to friends who antedate him. . . ." Blair Clark detected a kindred resentment vis à vis Stafford's first husband: "Liebling always considered that Lowell was his big rival. He was very jealous of the memory of Lowell."

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With or without Stafford, Liebling began to spend more of his time at his country retreat in The Springs, a tiny settlement near East Hampton, Long Island. He had bought the two-story, white clapboard house in 1952, under pressure from his second wife, Lucille, who liked to fancy herself the mistress of a country estate. Liebling gradually came to love the house and the thirty-one acres of land that came with it. One of his favorite self-indulgences was to lie on his back in the field behind the house, savoring his property.

Like Stafford, Liebling had never learned to drive. In The Springs they were dependent on the local taxi and on friends who picked them up for parties and shopping expeditions. By 1962 the couple was feeling the pressure of money problems. A steep hike in rent forced them to abandon their beloved Fifth Avenue apartment and take a much smaller and less comfortable place on West Tenth Street. "Neither of them was happy there," says Janet Malcolm, then a new friend.

For all his own love of drink, Liebling began to be disturbed by the proportions of Stafford's imbibing. Eve Auchincloss thinks that Liebling disapproved of her partly because he believed that, as one of Jean's drinking partners, she encouraged his wife's self-destructive tendencies. For her part, Stafford grew more and more upset about Liebling's eating. One of the ironies of this reversed Jack-Sprat-and-wife situation was the fact that, according to a number of friends, Stafford was a good cook, even though she had almost no interest in food. In the country, Liebling again tried to diet, once more failing miserably.

"He was not an epicure," says Janet Malcolm. "He just ate. He'd go to a French restaurant and eat a great meal, then, on his way back to the office, have a Boston cream pie." Raymond Sokolov piquantly analyzes Liebling's lifelong love of food:

> At the center of this vision of ideal manhood was the refusal to obey the bourgeois principle of delayed gratification. In other words, Liebling had raised self-indulgence (as he defined self-indulgence) to the level of a first principle. To eat and overeat was, for Liebling, more than a crude gorge; gluttony was a badge of freedom. His belly was the outward and visible sign of an inward and manly grace.

By the end of 1962, however, Liebling's obesity had become life-threatening.

In and around East Hampton, Stafford began to cultivate her own society. One group with which she felt particularly comfortable comprised the homosexual literati of the area (even in college Stafford had found homosexual intellectuals congenial). Liebling, on the other hand, was annoyed by the "fags who were buzzing around" his wife.

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In Blair Clark's view, Stafford and Liebling had "a very strange relationship. . . . She told me he was a melancholic. He would lie in his bed, she'd cradle his head in her arms, and he would weep." Stafford also claimed to Clark that "she didn't write because he felt that she was so much better a writer than he, that if she was writing, he couldn't." This sounds like another disingenuous excuse for Stafford's block, but even so, it hints at a struggle between the two writers that was largely invisible from the outside.

Stafford's health was little better than Liebling's. At the age of forty-seven, she had developed, as she wryly put it, "the acne [I] should have got at 17." She attributed this skin condition, for which she took twice-weekly injections, to smoking and drinking combined with a hormone imbalance linked to her hysterectomy.

In October 1963 Stafford began seeing Dr. Thomas Roberts, who was her personal physician for the rest of her life. On a medical-history form, she answered yes to many questions, including, "Do you bruise easily?" "Does your hair fall out easily?" "Do you perspire excessively?" "Do you have to sleep propped up in bed?" "Do you worry very much?" and "Do people often annoy or irritate you?" She acknowledged "frequent or severe sore throats," "hot weather bothers," "lumps or nodules in breasts," "chronic cough," "night sweats," "bronchial trouble," "wheeze or whistle in chest on breathing," "pain or tight feeling in chest on exertion," "heart palpitation," "loss of appetite," "eat[ing] at irregular hours," "pain in stomach," and "nausea and vomiting"; she often was "constipated" and "nervous," "tire[d] easily," and found it "difficult to make up mind." Yet she answered no to a query about whether she had ever had a nervous breakdown.

On the same questionnaire Stafford admitted to sleeping seven to eight hours a day and working three to five; to smoking two packs of cigarettes a day; to drinking two cups of coffee daily and "about 8 ounces" of alcohol. Her blood pressure was a reasonable 140/80, but her pulse was 100. A "deep non-productive cough" was the chief complaint that had first brought her to Roberts.

When Stafford got drunk, she often pulled out a Ouija board and tried to communicate with the dead. Joseph Mitchell, Howard Moss, Dick Cavett, and other friends witnessed Stafford's inevitable efforts to get through to her brother, who had been killed in World War II. Says Mitchell, "I can hear her hitting the floor with her heels, in a frenzy: 'Speak! Speak!'" But Moss reports that "these sessions never lasted long. Joe Liebling didn't like Jean using the Ouija board, and when we heard his key in the door, the board was hastily put away." At one séance, however, Cavett watched as "Jean shot from her chair, knocking it over, and lurched sideways against the wall. She let out a Medea-like wail,

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followed by a heart-breaking, 'My . . . brother Dick . . . *hates* being dead!' " [Cavett's ellipses and italics].

By May 1962 Stafford's novel for Random House was seven years overdue. Her editor, Albert Erskine, had still not seen a word of it. Guilt about her procrastination must have afflicted Stafford constantly, yet she kept up the pretense that the book was coming along well. In 1960 she had allowed *The Griffin* to publish a biographical note claiming that she was "writing a sequel to her first novel, *Boston Adventure*, for publication next spring by Random House." Turning down magazine assignments, she wrote James Oliver Brown (who was thereby also losing potential income) that she needed the freedom to put all her energy into her novel.

Meanwhile, over the years Stafford pondered a series of more or less frivolous book projects as stopgaps and divertissements. Typical of these was her proposal to Brown, in 1958, that she and Eve Auchincloss write a book on manners. (Auchincloss indicates that the scheme was never a serious one; nor, she says, was a joint pipe dream of a children's book about a girl named Polly who grows up in Colorado.)

Without even having secured a contract for it, Stafford put in months—perhaps years—of work on her Arran-Samothrace lark. She let Howard Moss read some forty pages of manuscript; "it was," he recalls, "some of the most extraordinary prose I'd ever read." He begged her to publish the piece, even if she never finished it. In the files left behind after Stafford's death, there is a box full of clippings, family letters, notes, and the incipient *Samothrace* manuscript, which consists of about a hundred pages of typed drafts, most of them—as was Stafford's wont—variants of one another. She saved fifteen different versions of her opening paragraph, yet none of the variants goes beyond page twenty-eight. There *is* some extraordinary writing among these fugitive drafts, but it is hard to imagine how it might have all added up to a book.

In 1961, without informing Random House, Stafford had signed a contract with Farrar, Straus & Cudahy (to which firm her old friend and editor Robert Giroux had migrated) for a children's book. She received a mere thousand-dollar advance and a royalty of 5 percent on the first twenty thousand copies. Stafford cast her cat Elephi as the book's protagonist. The work proceeded smoothly, and *Elephi, the Cat with the High I.Q.* was published in September 1962.

This brief concoction is an utter delight. Nevertheless, the book sold fewer than three thousand copies; because Stafford had ordered fifty-six of those for herself, she ended up $645 in the red. She complained to James Oliver Brown that her publisher wasn't pushing the book.

Stafford came close to signing a contract for an *Elephi* sequel, but she was not able to get the advance she wanted. For another thousand dollars

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and a 5-percent royalty, she put together a children's book for Macmillan by retelling four tales from *The Arabian Nights*. Brown, as loyal as ever, was nonetheless disturbed by such hackwork deals. "If there is a week's work involved here, OK," he wrote her. "If it is major it is a pity to accept this."

Yet Stafford was beginning to feel she could not afford to turn her back on any easy money. In 1962 she traveled to Ohio State University, as she complained to Ann Honeycutt, "to read a story for $100 to a class of bonehead youths. (All youths are boneheaded.) It will cost about that much to store the cat." There were unmistakable signs in the air that she was now coasting on a reputation she had earned years before. A woman from some "tupenny-hapenny college on Long Island" invited her to give a lecture; as Stafford told it,

> She said that she could raise an honorarium of $10 and she thought it was a good idea because she had read in the Times literary supplement, in an article about the reading habits of college students[,] that "an astonishing majority have never heard of Jean Stafford, et al." and she felt that it was time for a "Jean Stafford revival."

Sooner or later Stafford had to face up to the mess she was in with Random House. Her seven-thousand-dollar advance had been spent years ago. On May 31, 1962—eight and a half years after signing her contract—Stafford wrote a letter that shocked Albert Erskine:

> For a long time and for a number of reasons, I have wanted to be released from my agreement with Random House, and I hope that as a friend you will understand them.
>
> The only one that needs to be stated is that, in spite of all our making a joke of it, I have an eccentric but ineradicable sense of being still your not very competent secretary, subject to scolding and I hate being scolded. . . . Nor can I help feeling very strongly that this has contributed to my block.

Stafford went on to voice a gratuitous complaint about Random House's handling of a reprint of *The Mountain Lion*.

Barely suppressing his outrage, Erskine wrote back,

> Since becoming your "editor"—nearly nine years ago—I have not seen one sentence on which to make any editorial comment, good or bad, so there has been no "scolding" about that. And none about the nondelivery of any manuscript, which I have more and more tried to avoid mentioning at all, beyond periodic expressions of interest (but never concern or even impatience).

He went on to say, however, that if that was really the way she felt about it, he would step aside and let another Random House editor work with

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her, and would even promise not to read anything she wrote until it was published.

Stafford refused the offer. She had already decided to dump Random House and move to Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. One of the heads of Random, Bennett Cerf, called his old friend James Oliver Brown to try to avert the crisis. "They are 'sick about it,' " Brown wrote Stafford. "They want to persuade you to stay and promise that Albert will be completely out of the picture." Cerf and his partner, Donald Klopfer, pleaded for a chance to meet face-to-face with Stafford to iron things out.

But Stafford had already managed to convince Brown that "the break must be made": Robert Giroux would be the right editor for her. When he and Cerf at last resigned themselves to losing Stafford, Klopfer not unreasonably demanded the return of the seven-thousand-dollar advance, plus 5 percent interest. Brown candidly admitted to Klopfer, "I have no idea how far she is into a novel. I suspect she has notes, but I'm not even sure of that." He asked Klopfer not to charge interest, and in the end Klopfer relented.

It is hard to judge whether Stafford really believed that Erskine's "scolding" had contributed to her block; by 1962 a kind of paranoia about editors was fast becoming an aspect of her hypochondriacal stance toward the whole world. It does seem evident, however, that the staff of Random House (like that of Harcourt, Brace before it) had consistently treated Stafford with all the support and esteem an author could ask for. Berton Roueché, who had Albert Erskine as his first editor, has said, "I can't imagine quarreling with him. . . . He was a real editor . . . most helpful, gentle, sweet-natured, very much concerned with the writers he worked with."

By May, Brown and Giroux had hammered out a new three-book contract for Stafford. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy (soon to be renamed Farrar, Straus & Giroux) agreed to give Stafford a twelve-thousand-dollar advance, of which seven thousand would buy off Random House and five thousand would go directly to her. The deadline for the novel was now January 15, 1965. Her new publisher would also bring out a book of her short stories, to be called *Bad Characters*, in 1964.

Although Brown had championed his client throughout the painful realignment, he privately confided to her his worries about her "mortgaging" against her advances:

> You have to work hard to get something which will earn $7,000 in the dim future and a further $5,000 which we may get from Roger [Straus]. This is a lot of money. We take it now and if the novel gets written I think we shall be OK. . . . Otherwise you are going to have a very bad period later on.

Giroux had other qualms. As Brown told Stafford, "Robert is very worried about the Greek-Scotland book (this is very much off the

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record . . .). They want a novel and it is a novel for which they are gambling."

Meanwhile, Stafford had confided to a few close friends that things were not going well with her marriage. "They really didn't have anything profoundly in common," says Eve Auchincloss today. By 1963, Liebling had sunk into a lasting depression, and the once-prolific reporter was finding it a struggle to finish articles. The year before, he had published his last book, a deft, nostalgic memoir of his early days in France called *Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris*. With Stafford, in July and August 1963 he toured Normandy and the Loire by chauffeured car. In the Allied cemetery on Normandy beach Stafford searched for her brother's grave but could not find it. During their voyage Liebling's depression deepened. Stafford later said, "My surmise is that he knew he would never see France again."

Back in the United States, Liebling soldiered on at *The New Yorker*. One November day when he was on a lunch break with his colleague Philip Hamburger, a disturbing incident occurred. "One of those New York grotesques appeared, half-crippled, half spastic," Hamburger recalls. "Joe took one look and began to cry. I could see something was wrong. He was on the edge."

Despite their marital difficulties, Stafford took Liebling's decline very hard. Shortly before Christmas he came down with a bad case of viral pneumonia. On December 20 Dr. Roberts examined Stafford and noted her "marked anxiety, sleeplessness, depression resulting from anxiety re husband[']s serious illness." Her drinking had also increased. Aware that she was taking tranquilizers, Roberts added a familiar and futile prescription: "*Rx*: no alc."

On December 21 Liebling was admitted to Doctors Hospital. Stafford tried to keep up her Christmas social rounds; Dick Cavett, who saw her at a bash that week, later judged that "Jean's eyebrow-raising presence at the party indicated not so much a lack of concern and devotion as a highly developed penchant for seeking escape." On December 27 Liebling suffered congestive heart failure as well as renal collapse and plunged into a coma. Stafford rode in the ambulance with her husband to the intensive-care unit of Mt. Sinai Hospital. She was not, however, with him when he died the next day. According to Raymond Sokolov, "His last words were not set down or even precisely understood. They were in French." At his death, Liebling was only fifty-nine.

Eve Auchincloss came over to Stafford's West Tenth Street apartment and stayed through the night with her. As Wilfrid Sheed subsequently observed, "Liebling's death left Jean well and truly stranded. She had, with her gifts, made another wonderful world for herself, like a child on a lonely afternoon[,] and now it too was gone."

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"God Loves You, and So Do I"

MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL

Because it is what he says always, to anyone
(the dull girl in the tollbooth at the Triboro Bridge,
the wrong number who calls every night at nine,
the lamed colostomist who checks on his colon,
even the stone-faced trooper who stops him
for driving 30 on the New York Thruway), my father,
the old Hassid from Frankfurt, passes through this life
in the vague service of some deific love,
so that now—having passed through hate
and back into love again—I find myself saying it too
as we skud down the turnpike from Bar Harbor to Boston,
and a vague, generalized tenderness comes over me
in which I am the large man who carries the sack
of his father like unleavened bread, the one appointed
to shake the seeds of his ancestry into the day,
and, as we cruise through the graffiti
of tollbooths and diners, I become once more
the wild ideologue of my father's life, a man
playing the harmonica and waving a white handkerchief
into the air, a man calling out to you—
"God loves you, and so do I."

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The Limits of Expertise

If You're So Smart, Why Ain't You Rich?

DONALD N. McCLOSKEY

AMERICANS SAY THEY DON'T HOLD MUCH WITH EXPERTS. Harry Truman said that the expert is someone who doesn't want to learn anything new because then he wouldn't be an expert. Europeans appear to need experts for a society of deference, to which the American response is a Bronx cheer. Though Nicholas Murray Butler made Morningside Heights an American refuge for experts, he said that they know more and more about less and less. The European next to him in the roll of remarks, Samuel Butler the Younger, had little respect for pretension in general but plenty for the pretension of experts: "The public do not know enough to be experts, yet know enough to decide between them." You don't say. The rhetoric of the New World abounds with deflations of pretense: "Look who's talking"; "Where do you get off?" "Who d'you think *you* are, Bub?" And from Maine to California the capitalistic, American democrat relishes that most American of sneers, that American Question: "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?"

Well, why ain't you? The American scholar suffers taunts, unimaginable in Germany or France, for not meeting a payroll, for not coming down from the ivory tower, for not getting wet behind the ears of his arrogant egghead. But, if he's so gosh darn smart, why *hasn't* he gotten rich?

The question cuts deeper than most scholars care to admit. The test of riches is a fair one if the expertise claims to deliver the riches, in gold or in glory. At a minimum the American Question should constrain scholarship about gold, and the story can therefore begin with economics. It goes further, though. The Question embarrasses anyone claiming profitable expertise who cannot show a profit, the historian second-guessing generals, or the critic propounding a formula for art. He who is

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so smart claims a Faustian knowledge, "Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits / To practice more than heavenly power permits."

I

Take it as an axiom of human behavior that people pick up five-hundred-dollar bills left on the sidewalk. The Axiom of Modest Greed involves no close calculation of advantage or large willingness to take a risk. The average person sees a quarter and sidles over to it; he sees a five-hundred-dollar bill and jumps for it. The axiom is not controversial. All economists subscribe to it, whether or not they "believe in the market" (as the shorthand test for ideology goes), and so should you. Yet it has a distressing outcome, a dismal commonplace of adult life, a sad little Five-Hundred-Dollar-Bill Theorem:

If the Axiom of Modest Greed applies, then there exists no sidewalk in the neighborhood of your house on which a five-hundred-dollar bill remains.

For proof, consider that if there had been a five-hundred-dollar bill lying there at one time, then, according to the axiom, someone would have picked it up before today.

From this scientific reasoning it is a short step to common sense. If a man offers advice on how to find a five-hundred-dollar bill on the sidewalk, for which he asks merely a nominal fee, the prudent adult declines the offer. If there really were a five-hundred-dollar bill, then the confidence man would pick it up himself.

Such common sense is so obvious that confidence games must clothe themselves in a false rhetoric of self-interest. In a trick called the Pigeon Drop, the victim (that is, the pigeon) is persuaded to part with his bank account as earnest money for a share in a bundle of money "found" on the sidewalk. He must be persuaded that the con men are asking for the earnest money only as self-interested protection against the pigeon himself absconding with the bundle (which, after the con men have disappeared with his bank account, turns out to be paper stacked between two ten-dollar bills). Even pigeons don't believe that someone will present them with five hundred dollars out of the goodness of his heart.

The leading case is the scheme to get rich quick. A letter arrives from Edward L. Green announcing: "The World's Greatest Secret! Now you can learn how to receive fifty thousand crisp five-dollar bills in the next ninety days. . . . A personal note from the originator of the plan." Green's surprising kindness is affirmed by Carl Winslow of Tulsa: "This is the

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only realistic money-making offer I've ever received. I participated because this plan truly makes sense!"

Common sense replies that the plan truly does not make sense, not any sense at all. Though the plan uses the rhetoric of mutual interest—believe me, fella, this deal's good for you and me both—it fails to turn the rhetoric on itself. If Mr. Green had the secret for receiving fifty thousand crisp five-dollar bills, he would clue you in only if your one crisp five-dollar bill was good for the chain and good for Edward L. Green. But you have no reason beyond Mr. Green's assurances to think you are early in the chain. If you are not, you send out money and get nothing in return. A child will subscribe to a chain letter—or a guaranteed investment in Civil War figurines or a set of presidential commemorative coins suitable for collectors—and expect to win; an adult will not. No one with experience of life believes Publisher's Clearing House when it writes, "*Ms. Z. Smithh,* you have just won $250,000." The adult does not expect fortune to come unbidden and asks prudently, "Why are they telling me this?" Prudence suspects an offer equivalent to picking up a five-hundred-dollar bill. Except to the flocks of optimistic Americans who invest daily in chain letters and prizewinning magazine subscriptions, this goes without saying.

Therefore, the bargains and hot tips and special deals for you alone offered by over-friendly men with clammy handshakes at dog tracks and used-car lots do not tempt the prudent adult. Yet similar offers made outside a Damon Runyon setting seem plausible to respectable if greedy folk. The high-class pigeons come flocking to the con, eager to believe that Mr. Expert is about to give them free advice on how to make a million.

Economists, for example, are routinely asked at cocktail parties what is going to happen to the interest rate or the price of housing or the price of corn. People think that asking an economist about the future is like asking the doctor at the party about that chest pain, getting an expert to do his job free. Take corn. Any agricultural economist in the Midwest spends much of his television airtime delivering expert opinion on what will happen next month to the price of corn. Surely he, this expert, must know if anyone does. It would be depressing news to be told that, after all, no one does know.

An economist who claims to know what is going to happen to the price of corn, however, is claiming to know how to pick up five hundred dollars. With a little borrowing on the equity of his home or his reputation for sobriety, he can proceed to pick up five hundred thousand dollars, then five hundred million, then more. Nothing to it. If an agricultural economist could predict the price of corn better than the futures market, he would be rich. Yet he does not put his money where his mouth is. He is not rich. It follows that he is not so smart.

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It may be objected that the profit making is risky and that professors of economics are cautious. Therefore, they do not put their money where their mouths are, even though their mouths are working fine. The objection has the problem that the bet on the price of corn can be hedged, which is insurance. It is no bet. Someone who can outsmart the market on average even a little can make a lot of money simply and safely. The opportunity to buy corn low and sell high, like the right to run a TV station in the 1960s or to import Toyotas in the 1980s, is like finding a five-hundred-dollar bill anytime you want.

It may be objected that the profit making is complicated and that professors of economics are elaborately trained experts in the complexities. Therefore the five-hundred-dollar bill is not available to just anyone, only to them. The wizards earn merely what they are worth, the normal return for years of studying wizardry. This objection, too, has problems. The first is that the wizards are telling us about the future price of corn or bonds or housing at cocktail parties and in the newspaper—for free. Why are they handing over to John Doe their just reward for going to wizard school? The second problem is that the wizardry claimed is systematic, formulaic, and, when you come right down to it, pretty simple. It involves the fitting of a few straight lines to scatters of points. Take a course in economic statistics, the promise goes, and become able to predict the future in profitable ways. The promise is hard to believe, because it sounds a lot like The World's Greatest Secret. Ordinary secrets and routine advice do flow from economics, and doubtless economists earn their keep. Unlimited wealth, however, cannot be expected to flow from a book or even from many years of concentrated study in economics. Compared to unlimited wealth, many years of study is like the trivial cost of reaching down to pick up a five-hundred-dollar bill. If someone knows a scholarly formula for predicting the price of corn, it would already have been exploited.

The same grim truth from the American Question applies to the stock market. Because the stock market is obviously a matter of expectations, about which we all know something, and because it is crowded with experts in handsome wool suits, the truth is hard to swallow. Hey, *Barron's* and "Wall Street Week" wouldn't kid me, would they? Surely all those analysts and pundits and technical elves know *something*.

No, unhappily, they surely do not. They truly do not make sense, not any sense at all. The reason they do not is the American Question and the Five-Hundred-Dollar-Bill Theorem: there exists no sidewalk in your neighborhood with five hundred dollars of stock-market profits lying on it. If a stockbroker were so smart, he would not be making his riches by selling stock tips to widows and orphans. In the style of the chain letter, the tipster divulges inside information for his gain and your loss. The

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rhetorical pose of stockbrokers and racetrack tipsters to be offering prudent advice is contradicted by their circumstances, a contradiction catalogued in rhetoric as the "circumstantial *ad hominem*." That is to say, "Being so smart, why don't you do it yourself, if it's such good advice?"

"A tout," said Damon Runyon, who knew the score on the economics of prediction, "is a guy who goes around a race track giving out tips on the races, if he can find anybody who will listen to his tips, especially suckers, and a tout is nearly always broke. If he is not broke, he is by no means a tout, but a handicapper, and is respected by one and all."

We know the force of the American Question and the Five-Hundred-Dollar-Bill Theorem as well as we know anything. If we know that the sun will rise tomorrow and that prime numbers are odd, we know that people who were so smart would be rich and that sidewalks that were so filled with five-hundred-dollar bills would be cleared. Therefore, a prediction about stocks—as distinct from mere current information about the market, a mere statement of the going odds, a mere consensus of public opinion, reflected in the price—is on average worthless.

It has been easy, therefore, to assemble statistical evidence that the Five-Hundred-Dollar-Bill Theorem is true about Wall Street: stock markets everywhere do in fact jiggle about in unpredictable ways. The evidence is by now overwhelming. In 1933 Alfred Cowles, the founder of the journal *Econometrica*, posed the question in a title, "Can Stock Market Forecasters Forecast?" "It is," he answered, "doubtful." Cowles himself had abandoned a forecasting business in 1931, ashamed of his failure to foresee the Great Crash. Burton Malkiel's *A Random Walk Down Wall Street* (1985) gives an accessible summary of the research since Cowles; one such study is P. H. Cootner, ed., *The Random Character of Stock Prices* (1964). The forecastability of stock prices continues to be at best doubtful.

It may be objected that sophisticated people do in fact buy stock-market advice. An economist (and only an economist) would conclude that something of value had been bought. A reply has been suggested by James Burk, a sociologist and former stockbroker, who found that the advice-giving industry sprang from legal decisions early in the century. The courts began to decide that the trustee of a pension fund or of a child's inheritance could be held liable for bad investing if he did not take advice. The effect would have been the same had the courts decided that prudent men should consult Ouija boards or the flights of birds. It was so at Rome: a consul who ignored the advice of the college of augurs was liable to prosecution after retirement. America decided through its judges that an industry giving advice on the stock market should come into existence, whether or not it was worthless. It did, and it was.

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(Europe is not similarly blessed, because the law is different.) The industry can go out of existence the same way. The judge who first asks the American Question and rules a stockbroker liable for his unsuccessful advice will save many a widow and orphan from investment counseling.

It may be objected that, after all, a great deal of money is made in the stock market. This is true also at the track in Miami. Grandfather Stueland was offered Radio Corporation of America stock in the early 1920s and regretted later that he had invested in Stueland Electric instead. Some people did buy RCA; they must have known. But that some people win with the stockbroker or the hundred-dollar window at Hialeah does not mean that they were justified in their true belief. They could have won by luck rather than by a justifying technique. People win at slot machines, too, but cannot tell how, because they use no justifiable, inscribable, bookable technique. And even if some people *do* know they will win (God appears to them in a dream and tells them, maybe; or they have genuine inside knowledge), there is no way for the common pigeon to know that these alleged experts know. Why would they be telling you, Bub?

It may be objected at last that the economist or another seer in the stock or bond or housing market does not have access to the big loans to make big money. Yet consortiums do, and if the wisdom comes simply from being an economist, it ought to be easy to assemble them. A consortium of famous economists at Stanford and the University of Chicago in the early 1970s believed that interest rates, which were then at shocking, unprecedented highs (6, 6.5, my Lord, even 7.5 percent), just had to come down. The price of bonds, in other words, just had to go up. A good time to buy bonds. The economists complained at lunch that their bankers would not loan them money to exploit this sure thing, the world's greatest secret. But in the event, sadly, the bankers were right. Interest rates did not fall; they rose. The consortium of economists, relying on its collective expertise, lost its collective shirt.

The routine is the usual one. I myself have lost a shirt or two on real estate deals bound to succeed and on a consortium of economists speculating in the foreign exchanges. From John Maynard Keynes (who lost money regularly before breakfast) and Irving Fisher (who reduced Yale's endowment to half Harvard's by touting stocks in 1928) down to the latest scheme of some economist to make money from mathematical models of gold speculation, economists have not earned the confidence of bankers. As it was put by Paul Samuelson, a student of these matters, "It's a mug's game for a dentist—or an associate professor of econometrics—to think that he and the telephone can have an edge over those who count the cocoa pods in Africa and follow the minute-by-minute arrival of new information."

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The best-known counter-example among economists is said to be the late Otto Eckstein, a superb economist with much common sense who extended the large-scale econometric model into commercial use. He built Data Resources, Inc., into a company with revenues in 1984 of eighty-four million dollars. But Data Resources did not use its own predictions of prices and interest rates to speculate. It sold them to others, mainly to companies who wanted a myth of knowledge to comfort them in uncertainty and to answer wrathful stockholders: "We took the best advice." If Data Resources had believed its own predictions to the extent of speculating on them, and was correct in its belief, then it could have become fabulously richer than it was. To say that Otto Eckstein or Paul Samuelson or other honest purveyors of economic tips became in fact a little bit rich does not answer the American Question. Eckstein and Samuelson (and Louis Rukeyser of Wall Street and Hot Horse Herbie of Broadway) became rich by *selling* advice, in the form of models and statistical equations and other charming talk, not by using it.

Cato the Elder reported of the haruspices, who examined livers in Rome with an expertise approaching the econometric, that they could not but laugh on meeting one another. Economists know lots of similar gags about their inability to predict profitably: forecasting is very difficult, especially if it is about the future; an economist is an expert who can tell you tomorrow why the thing he predicted yesterday didn't happen today; the best I can hope for in a forecast is to be intelligently wrong or fortunately right.

Yet one must not get carried away. No one doubts that a well-informed economist can tell you a thing or two about the future, mainly from knowing the present well. As the economist Robert Solow remarked about the predictions from Data Resources, "Every month it provides an orderly description of the data, organized in such a way that one's attention is called to events that seem to conform with a reasonable person's understanding of the economy." The American Question casts no doubt on predictions that offer little or no profit. A prediction makes no profit if it is a commonplace or if it does not offer a way to buy low and sell high. Predicting that the national income will not fall to zero next year is no more profitable than predicting that the sun will rise tomorrow.

Other people view economists as social weather forecasters. Economists are not happy with that analogy, since they know they are not so smart. Weather forecasters and price forecasters could both earn a lot of money on a good forecast if they could keep it secret. Come to mention it, though, economists don't do much of a job as public forecasters. Victor Zarnowitz, the leading scholar in the field, makes only modest claims for the most promising method. A recent study by Zarnowitz and Geoffrey

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Moore showed that "leading indicators," invented by Moore and now reported monthly in the press, can indeed predict business cycle peaks—but with leads, alas, ranging from one to nineteen months. "The economists are generally right in their predictions," Sidney Webb said once, "but generally a good deal out in their dates." Predicting the end of prosperity as coming somewhere in the next nineteen months is a little better than saying that, if it's August, then southern Florida has a fair chance after a while of getting a hurricane. Yet it is not so smart that the economic forecaster could retire to Miami. It is not good enough to be profitable; and if it were, it would already be discounted.

There are other ways of getting to the same doubt that economists can predict. For one thing, unlike humans, hurricanes are not listening. Humans react to economic predictions in ways that dampen or magnify the predictions. It would be as though the hurricane currently north of Cuba reacted to a forecast that tomorrow it was going to move to Miami by saying, "Hmm, I'd better turn around and go to Haiti instead." This is the point made by conservative economists suggesting that people have "rational expectations." One does not have to accept every notion in rational expectations to believe the more modest theorem proposed here. It would suggest, modestly, that the people are not so stupid that they are easy to surprise; if they are not easy to surprise, then the economy is not easy to manipulate, and its manipulators would not be rich.

Further and more deeply, the equations of fluid dynamics applicable to the weather do not include an equation that rules out cheap but profitable predictions. Economic models do. A person who was smart enough to know the solutions to the economic equations would be rich, unless profitable solutions were already anticipated and discounted by the model. But they should be discounted, according to the Five-Hundred-Dollar-Bill Theorem. If the model is a widely available piece of information, or if its essence were embodied in a widely held judgment, it would be useless for making anyone rich. Wise in retrospect, maybe; rich in prospect, no.

The American Question and the Five-Hundred-Dollar-Bill Theorem radically limit what economists and calculators can know about the future. No economist watches the TV program "Wall Street Week" without a vague sense that he is betraying his science. He should be pleased. His science proves its robustness by asserting confidently that the science cannot profitably predict—indeed, that no science of humankind can profitably predict, even the science of stockbrokers. The economic theorem is so powerful that it applies to economists.

The post-modern economist is modest about profit-worthy detail, the detail from which he could buy low and sell high. He must be modest

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especially about the proud claim of economics in the 1960s, the claim to fine-tune the economy, making detailed adjustments to money and taxes to offset a depression just around the corner. As economists realize now after much tragedy sprung from hubris, if an economist could see around the corner, he would be rich. Fine-tuning violates the theorem: a fine-tuner would see dozens of five-hundred-dollar bills lying around his neighborhood. The economists go on relating impossibly detailed scenarios into the microphones of television reporters, but in their hearts they know they are wrong.

The American Question requires intellectual modesty in the economic expert, if he does not want people to laugh on meeting him. Hubris will need divine protection. Xenophon reported Socrates as saying: "Those who intend to manage [*oikesein*] houses or cities well are in need of divination. For the craft of carpenter . . . or economics [*oikonomikon*] . . . may be learned . . . ; but the greatest of these matters the gods reserve to themselves. . . . If anyone supposes that these [divinations] are not beyond reason, and nothing in them beyond our judgment, he is himself beyond reason." Socrates could turn to the oracles for divine supplementation of a craft. We have lost today the favor of the gods, and books on economic technique will not assuage our woe.

II

All this concerns economics; but there is more. The more leads back to the ancient and sensible doubt that critics can do as much in the way of art as artists can. The American Question mocks the hubris of the critic.

The critic's coin of profit need not be monetary. Political power is there on the sidewalk, too, waiting to be picked up if the 500,000-vote theorem is wrong. But of course the theorem is right. You cannot find a simple way, to be written down in a book, for getting 500,000 votes. If you think you can, well, why not try? Similarly, prestige in the local saloon would be cheaply available if the American Question did not also cast doubt on predictions of sporting events. But it does. The lineaments of the sporting future apparent to the average guy will be reflected in the sporting odds. Only fresh details give profits above average measured in money or prestige. Fresh details are hard to come by. Information, like steel, is costly to produce.

The American Question can be asked of all predictions of trends—in journalism, sociology, political science, commercial art, and elsewhere. It mocks the claims of predictors, social engineers, and critics of the

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social arts. The predictor who could get it usefully right would be a god incarnate, a diviner.

The reason is not that humans are too complicated or too changeable or too free. The humanistic criticisms of social science may be true but they are not telling; they are easy to make and easy to answer. The scientists answer, "Give us the money and we will finish the job." If humans are "ultimately" free, considered as individuals, they still can be predicted on average and in the mass. And if human masses are complex, they still can be predicted with another million dollars and another model. So long as humans are to be viewed as molecules bouncing against each other, the problem is merely to get the mathematics right. It is said that making predictions about human beings is bound to be more complicated than making predictions about planets or pigeons, but that is not true. It depends on what you are trying to predict. The heartbeat of a human is easier to predict than the twitching of the sixty-seventh feather on the pigeon's tail. It is a matter of how ambitious the prediction is. The "simple" problem of space flight, "merely" an application of Newton's laws, requires days of computation at high speed if the ambition is to put a rocket precisely *there* on Mars. For a given ambition, the complexity is only a matter of computer time.

The American Question puts more fundamental limits on what we humans can say about ourselves. It puts a limit on mechanical models of human behavior. It does not make the mechanical models useless for interesting history or routine prediction; it just makes them useless for gaining an edge about the future. If people were as predictable as naive behaviorism alleges, for instance, the psychologists would be rich and the personnel managers all-powerful. The field of industrial and managerial psychology was erected in the 1930s on just such a putative secret, but it led to miracles only on Thirty-fourth Street. To revert again to economics, the various "solutions" of bargaining problems have this flaw: that if the economist knew the solution, then so would the players, which would make the solution valueless. The Turing machine that could predict the next move of a competitor would sell for a lot of money. If Turing machines are cheap, no one can get rich by using them to outsmart others.

Likewise there are limits on the teachability of skills. It is paradoxical to claim that a Ph.D. qualifies one to teach "entrepreneurship," or even "excellence." The present content of the business school, with its burden of mechanical technique, undervalues the stories and moralities that make a business culture. Yet the humanities cannot be taught by machine, either. Gary Walton, an economist and dean of a business school, has written a book called *Beyond Winning* about "philosopher coaches," such as Woody Hayes in football or John Wooden in basket-

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ball. He is aware that, if coaching could be learned from a book, the woods would be full of Woodys and Woodens. If coaching were mechanical in its effects on the athletes, then East Germany would never lose an Olympic contest. The ability to teach exceptional performance is itself an exceptional performance. What can be said about the athletic case is what can be said about the scholarly case: that a great coach or a great scholar teaches not by instructing the students in a bookable technique but by exhibiting a way of life.

The limit on calculability and say-ability applies to language and rhetoric itself. If anyone could get his way by shouting, for example, then everyone would shout. H. P. Grice affixed an economic tag to the trumping of speech conventions: "exploitation." As Stephen Levinson put the point in his recent book *Pragmatics:*

> There is a fundamental way in which a full account of the communicative power of language can never be reduced to a set of conventions for the use of language. The reason is that wherever some convention or expectation about the use of language arises, there will also therewith arise the possibility of the non-conventional *exploitation* of that convention or expectation. It follows that a purely conventional or rule-based account of natural language usage can never be complete.

A rhetorical analysis has this limit: that it can tell wisely and well how a speech has gone in the past, but cannot be expected to provide the world's greatest secret for the future. It can show how Cicero in *Pro Archia* exploited tricolon, how Descartes exploited rhetoric to attack rhetoric itself, or how Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* exploited an irony that was always intended, covert, finite, and stable. But rhetoric cannot be finished and formulaic, or else anyone could be a Cicero, Descartes, or Austen. The chimera of a once-finished formula for language must be left to Fregean philosophy or to magic.

Before Faust turns in vexation to magic he laments, "I see that we can know nothing! / It nearly breaks my heart." On reflection he amends this sweeping skepticism. The American Question does not imply literally that *wir nichts wissen können* but merely, as he then complains on behalf of his fellow men, that Faust can know nothing that betters mankind—*die Menschen zu bessern.* On reflecting a little more, however, he comes to the nub: his studies have taught him nothing that betters Dr. Faust, this very part of mankind. "And *I* have neither property nor money, / Nor honor and glory in the world: / No dog should go on living so"; *"Auch hab ich weder Gut noch Geld. . . ."* There lies the tragedy—at the impossibility of predictions profitable to *Faust* himself. He seeks the world's greatest secret for personal profit, which in due course he obtains, though not for free lying there on the sidewalk, *und hatte sowohl Gut als Geld.*

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Lacking the Devil's bargain, science cannot predict itself. The paradox shows up in economics because economics so plainly must apply to itself, if it's so smart. But the paradox applies to any foreknowledge of new knowledge. The impossibility of self-prediction has become a commonplace in philosophy. You do not know today what you will decide tomorrow, unless you have already decided it, in which case it is not tomorrow but today that you decide it.

Prescience is an oxymoron, like cheap fortunes: pre-science, knowing before one knows. Prescience is required for central planning of science. Karl Popper and Alasdair MacIntyre among others have pointed out that knowing the future of science requires knowing the science of the future. It is not to be done. MacIntyre notes that the unpredictability of mathematical innovation is a rigorous case, resting on theorems concerning the incompleteness of arithmetic and the incalculability of certain expressions, proven by Gödel and Church in the 1930s. And "if the future of mathematics is unpredictable, so is a great deal else." If someone claims to know what method or lack of method would yield good science, why isn't he scientifically rich?

The other arts are similarly constrained. Some critics in the eighteenth century believed they had methods for assuring excellence in drama or painting. Nowadays no one would claim to have a formulaic, bookable method for constructing excellent paintings, except as a postmodern joke. The method would solve painting, in the sense that tic-tac-toe has been solved. This is not to say that rules of perspective or color harmonies cannot be constructed and applied. They can, the way a poet can check for agreement with the meter she has chosen or a dancer can check his fifth position. It says only that there is at present no routine, book-readable method for achieving artistic riches. The unusually profitable opportunities have been picked up, leaving normal returns to normal ability.

Each bit of the accumulated routine was once someone's personal and profitable trick. The genius has more tricks than the rest of us—tricks that become tomorrow's routines. The first Florentine businessman to use double-entry bookkeeping gained a control over his materials similar in value to the first Athenian sculptor's use of the slouch of standing bodies. In this age of iron, no one earns five hundred dollars from the mere idea of double entries or contrapposto. Any present day is an age of iron, because gold is picked up as soon as it appears.

The distinction between routine predictions and startling and profitable divination is analogous to the distinction between routine cooking and the profitable art of three-star cookery. In a peculiar little dialogue, the *Ion*, Socrates lampoons Ion, the performing Artist, who imagines he *knows* something. It is significant that, to mock Ion's claim to knowl-

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edge, Socrates uses the example of divining. As Plato and the American Question would say, the claim of divining to be an art, Greek *techne*, a mere bookable craft, is absurd.

Plato therefore wished to cage poetry, the god-possession that flatters men to think they know more than does the honest artisan, a technician in every sense. The followers of Plato down to the age of technique are enamored of knowledge as *techne*, a craft written down in books. They propose to cast books lacking such craft into the flames, as poetry and pretense, mere sophistry and illusion. The trouble is that their version of the fully rational life, the bookable final rules for language games, requires unusual prediction. And in human affairs a prediction beyond what earns merely usual returns is impossible, except by entrepreneurs, idiot savants, *auteurs*, and other prodigies of tacit knowledge. The notion that bookable knowledge can guide the world through its difficult moments, like the notion that central planning can guide an economy, is self-contradictory. If the philosopher kings and central planners were so smart, they, too, would be rich.

As indeed they are, for a reason other than their ability to predict. They live in a world ever hopeful that procedure, mechanism, calculation, bureaucracy, MBA degrees, and other social *techne* will keep us warm and safe. It will not, as the American Question reminds us so rudely, though the world is willing to pay for the illusion.

III

Nothing I have said implies that the project of acquiring systematic knowledge about the economy or about poems and paintings is worthless. Inside the margin, as economists say, it is worthful. The world runs on little else. Everyone needs to know how to write with an alphabet, though it took a Phoenician genius to think it up and make his fortune. No one afterwards, though, can expect to make a fortune by knowing the ABCs.

An economist examining the business world is like a critic examining the art world. Economists and other human scientists can reflect intelligently on present conditions and can tell useful stories about the past. These produce wisdom, which permits broad, conditional "predictions." Some are obvious; some require an economist; but none is a machine for achieving fame or riches.

The economist says, if a government shoots everyone with eyeglasses, the economy will not perform well. Or, if voluntary restrictions such as those in force a few years ago on Japanese automobile imports are reinstated, then the Japanese manufacturers will benefit by about $1,000 per car, and the American auto buyers will pay about $160,000

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per year for each job saved in Detroit. Though useful as wisdom, and justifying the economist's role as critical theorist, neither of these predictions is bankable.

The argument is merely that, at the margin, where supernormal profits and reputations for genius are being made, the observer's knowledge is not the same as the doer's; the critic is no improvement as artist over the artist; the model of the future is no substitute for the entrepreneur's god-possessed hunch. The critics become ridiculous only when they confuse speaking well about the past with doing well in the future. Critics of art and literature stopped being ridiculous this way a long time ago. It would be a fine thing if critics of society would join them in their modest and sober sophistication.

No one is justly subject to the American Question who retains a proper modesty about what observation and recording and storytelling can do. We can observe the history of economies or the history of painting, and in retrospect tell a story about how security of commercial property or the analysis of vanishing points made for good things. An expert such as an economist is an expert on the past and an expert only about the future that can be known without divine and profitable possession. Human scientists and critics of human arts, in other words, write history, not prophecy.

Harry Truman had it about right. The expert as expert, a bookish sort consulting what is already known, cannot by his nature learn anything new, because then he wouldn't be an expert. He would be an entrepreneur, a statesman, or an Artist with a capital *A*. To these the expert critic can properly retort: if you're so rich, why aren't you smart? But, anyway, the bookish sort has to settle for low wages. Smartness of the scholar's sort cannot proceed to riches.

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Falling into Life

LEONARD KRIEGEL

IT IS NOT THE ACTUAL DEATH a man is doomed to die but the deaths his imagination anticipates that claim attention as one grows older. We are constantly being reminded that the prospect of death forcefully concentrates the mind. While that may be so, it is not a prospect that does very much else for the imagination—other than to make one aware of its limitations and imbalances.

Over the past five years, as I have moved into the solidity of middle-age, my own most formidable imaginative limitation has turned out to be a surprising need for symmetry. I am possessed by a peculiar passion: I want to believe that my life has been balanced out. And because I once had to learn to fall in order to keep that life mine, I now seem to have convinced myself that I must also learn to fall into death.

Falling into life wasn't easy, and I suspect that is why I hunger for such awkward symmetry today. Having lost the use of my legs during the polio epidemic that swept across the eastern United States during the summer of 1944, I was soon immersed in a process of rehabilitation that was, at least when looked at in retrospect, as much spiritual as physical.

That was a full decade before the discovery of the Salk vaccine ended polio's reign as the disease most dreaded by America's parents and their children. Treatment of the disease had been standardized by 1944: following the initial onslaught of the virus, patients were kept in isolation for a period of ten days to two weeks. Following that, orthodox medical opinion was content to subject patients to as much heat as they could stand. Stiff paralyzed limbs were swathed in heated, coarse woolen towels known as "hot packs." (The towels were that same greenish brown as blankets issued to American GIs, and they reinforced a boy's sense of being at war.) As soon as the hot packs had baked enough pain and stiffness out of a patient's body so that he could be moved on

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and off a stretcher, the treatment was ended, and the patient faced a series of daily immersions in a heated pool.

I would ultimately spend two full years at the appropriately named New York State Reconstruction Home in West Haverstraw. But what I remember most vividly about the first three months of my stay there was being submerged in a hot pool six times a day, for periods of between fifteen and twenty minutes. I would lie on a stainless steel slab, my face alone out of water, while the wet heat rolled against my dead legs and the physical therapist was at my side working at a series of manipulations intended to bring my useless muscles back to health.

Each immersion was a baptism by fire in the water. While my mind pitched and reeled with memories of the "normal" boy I had been a few weeks earlier, I would close my eyes and focus not, as my therapist urged, on bringing dead legs back to life but on my strange fall from the childhood grace of the physical. Like all eleven-year-old boys, I had spent a good deal of time thinking about my body. Before the attack of the virus, however, I thought about it only in connection with my own lunge toward adolescence. Never before had my body seemed an object in itself. Now it was. And like the twenty-one other boys in the ward—all of us between the ages of nine and twelve—I sensed I would never move beyond that fall from grace, even as I played with memories of the way I once had been.

Each time I was removed from the hot water and placed on a stretcher by the side of the pool, there to await the next immersion, I was fed salt tablets. These were simply intended to make up for the sweat we lost, but salt tablets seemed to me the cruelest confirmation of my new status as spiritual debtor. Even today, more than four decades later, I still shiver at the mere thought of those salt tablets. Sometimes the hospital orderly would literally have to pry my mouth open to force me to swallow them. I dreaded the nausea the taste of salt inspired in me. Each time I was re-submerged in the hot pool, I would grit my teeth—not from the flush of heat sweeping over my body but from the thought of what I would have to face when I would again be taken out of the water. To be an eater of salt was far more humiliating than to endure pain. Nor was I alone in feeling this way. After lights-out had quieted the ward, we boys would furtively whisper from cubicle to cubicle of how we dreaded being forced to swallow salt tablets. It was that, rather than the pain we endured, that anchored our sense of loss and dread.

Any recovery of muscle use in a polio patient usually took place within three months of the disease's onset. We all knew that. But as time passed, every boy in the ward learned to recite stories of those who, like Lazarus, had witnessed their own bodily resurrection. Having fallen from physical grace, we also chose to fall away from the reality in front

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of us. Our therapists were skilled and dedicated, but they weren't wonder-working saints. Paralyzed legs and arms rarely responded to their manipulations. We could not admit to ourselves, or to them, that we were permanently crippled. But each of us knew without knowing that his future was tied to the body that floated on the stainless steel slab.

We sweated out the hot pool and we choked on the salt tablets, and through it all we looked forward to the promise of rehabilitation. For, once the stiffness and pain had been baked and boiled out of us, we would no longer be eaters of salt. We would not be what we once had been, but at least we would be candidates for re-entry into the world, admittedly made over to face its demands encased in leather and steel.

I suppose we might have been told that our fall from grace was permanent. But I am still grateful that no one—neither doctors nor nurses nor therapists, not even that sadistic orderly, himself a former polio patient, who limped through our lives and through our pain like some vengeful presence—told me that my chances of regaining the use of my legs were nonexistent. Like every other boy in the ward, I organized my needs around whatever illusions were available. And the illusion I needed above any other was that one morning I would simply wake up and rediscover the "normal" boy of memory, once again playing baseball in French Charley's Field in Bronx Park rather than roaming the fields of his own imagination. At the age of eleven, I needed to weather reality, not face it. And to this very day, I silently thank those who were concerned enough about me, or indifferent enough to my fate, not to tell me what they knew.

Like most boys, sick or well, I was an adaptable creature—and rehabilitation demanded adaptability. The fall from bodily grace transformed each of us into acolytes of the possible, pragmatic Americans for whom survival was method and strategy. We would learn, during our days in the New York State Reconstruction Home, to confront the world that was. We would learn to survive the way we were, with whatever the virus had left intact.

I had fallen away from the body's prowess, but I was being led toward a life measured by different standards. Even as I fantasized about the past, it disappeared. Rehabilitation, I was to learn, was ahistorical, a future devoid of any significant claim on the past. Rehabilitation was a thief's primer of compensation and deception: its purpose was to teach one how to steal a touch of the normal from an existence that would be striking in its abnormality.

When I think back to those two years in the ward, the boy who made his rehabilitation most memorable was Joey Tomashevski. Joey was the son of an upstate dairy farmer, a Polish immigrant who had come to America before the Depression and whose English was even poorer than

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the English of my own shtetl-bred father. The virus had left both of Joey's arms so lifeless and atrophied that I could circle where his bicep should have been with pinky and thumb and still stick the forefinger of my other hand through. And yet, Joey assumed that he would make do with whatever had been left him. He accepted without question the task of making his toes and feet over into fingers and hands. With lifeless arms encased in a canvas sling that looked like the breadbasket a European peasant might carry to market, Joey would sit up in bed and demonstrate how he could maneuver fork and spoon with his toes.

I would never have dreamed of placing such confidence in my fingers, let alone my toes. I found, as most of the other boys in the ward did, Joey's unabashed pride in the flexibility and control with which he could maneuver a forkful of mashed potatoes into his mouth a continuous indictment of my sense of the world's natural order. We boys with dead legs would gather round his bed in our wheelchairs and silently watch Joey display his dexterity with a vanity so open and naked that it seemed an invitation to being struck down yet again. But Joey's was a vanity already tested by experience. For he was more than willing to accept whatever challenges the virus threw his way. For the sake of demonstrating his skill to us, he kicked a basketball from the auditorium stage through the hoop attached to a balcony some fifty feet away. When one of our number derisively called him "lucky," he proceeded to kick five of seven more balls through that same hoop.

I suspect that Joey's pride in his ability to compensate for what had been taken away from him irritated me, because I knew that, before I could pursue my own rehabilitation with such singular passion, I had to surrender myself to what was being demanded of me. And that meant I had to learn to fall. It meant that I had to learn, as Joey Tomashevski had already learned, how to transform absence into opportunity. Even though I still lacked Joey's instinctive willingness to live with the legacy of the virus, I found myself being overhauled, recreated in much the same way as a car engine is rebuilt. Nine months after I arrived in the ward, a few weeks before my twelfth birthday, I was fitted for double long-legged braces bound together by a steel pelvic band circling my waist. Lifeless or not, my legs were precisely measured, the steel carefully molded to form, screws and locks and leather joined to one another for my customized benefit alone. It was technology that would hold me up—another offering on the altar of compensation. "You get what you give," said Jackie Lyons, my closest friend in the ward. For he, too, was now a novitiate of the possible. He, too, now had to learn how to choose the road back.

Falling into life was not a metaphor; it was real, a process learned only through doing, the way a baby learns to crawl, to stand, and then to

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walk. After the steel bands around calves and thighs and pelvis had been covered over by the rich-smelling leather, after the braces had been precisely fitted to allow my fear-ridden imagination the surety of their holding presence, I was pulled to my feet. For the first time in ten months, I stood. Two middle-aged craftsmen, the hospital bracemakers who worked in a machine shop deep in the basement, held me in place as my therapist wedged two wooden crutches beneath my shoulders.

They stepped back, first making certain that my grip on the crutches was firm. Filled with pride in their technological prowess, the three of them stood in front of me, admiring their skill. Had I been created in the laboratory of Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein, I could not have felt myself any more the creature of scientific pride. I stood on the braces, crutches beneath my shoulders slanting outward like twin towers of Pisa. I flushed, swallowed hard, struggled to keep from crying, struggled not to be overwhelmed by my fear of falling.

My future had arrived. The leather had been fitted, the screws had been turned to the precise millimeter, the locks at the knees and the bushings at the ankles had been properly tested and retested. That very afternoon I was taken for the first time to a cavernous room filled with barbells and Indian clubs and crutches and walkers. I would spend an hour each day there for the next six months. In the rehab room, I would learn how to mount two large wooden steps made to the exact measure of a New York City bus. I would swing parallel bars from one side to the other, my arms learning how they would have to hurl me through the world. I balanced Indian clubs like a circus juggler because my therapist insisted it would help my coordination. And I was expected to learn to fall.

I was a dutiful patient. I did as I was told because I could see no advantage to doing anything else. I hungered for the approval of those in authority—doctors, nurses, therapists, the two bracemakers. Again and again, my therapist demonstrated how I was to throw my legs from the hip. Again and again, I did as I was told. Grabbing the banister with my left hand, I threw my leg from the hip while pushing off my right crutch. Like some baby elephant (despite the sweat lost in the heated pool, the months of inactivity in bed had fattened me up considerably), I dangled from side to side on the parallel bars. Grunting with effort, I did everything demanded of me. I did it with an unabashed eagerness to please those who had power over my life. I wanted to put myself at risk. I wanted to do whatever was supposed to be "good" for me. I believed as absolutely as I have ever believed in anything that rehabilitation would finally placate the hunger of the virus.

But when my therapist commanded me to fall, I cringed. For the prospect of falling terrified me. Every afternoon, as I worked through my

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prescribed activities, I prayed that I would be able to fall when the session ended. Falling was the most essential "good" of all the "goods" held out for my consideration by my therapist. I believed that. I believed it so intensely that the belief itself was painful. Everything else asked of me was given—and given gladly. I mounted the bus stairs, pushed across the parallel bars until my arms ached with the effort, allowed the medicine ball to pummel me, flailed away at the empty air with my fists because my therapist wanted me to rid myself of the tension within. The slightest sign of approval from those in authority was enough to make me puff with pleasure. Other boys in the ward might not have taken rehabilitation seriously, but I was an eager servant cringing before the promise of approval.

Only I couldn't fall. As each session ended, I would be led to the mats that took up a full third of the huge room. "It's time," the therapist would say. Dutifully, I would follow her, step after step. Just as dutifully, I would stand on the edge of those two-inch-thick mats, staring down at them until I could feel my body quiver. "All you have to do is let go," my therapist assured me. "The other boys do it. Just let go and fall."

But the prospect of letting go was precisely what terrified me. That the other boys in the ward had no trouble in falling added to my shame and terror. I didn't need my therapist to tell me the two-inch-thick mats would keep me from hurting myself. I knew there was virtually no chance of injury when I fell, but that knowledge simply made me more ashamed of a cowardice that was as monumental as it was unexplainable. Had it been able to rid me of my sense of my own cowardice, I would happily have settled for bodily harm. But I was being asked to surrender myself to the emptiness of space, to let go and crash down to the mats below, to feel myself suspended in air when nothing stood between me and the vacuum of the world. *That* was the prospect that overwhelmed me. *That* was what left me sweating with rage and humiliation. The contempt I felt was for my own weakness.

I tried to justify what I sensed could never be justified. Why should I be expected to throw myself into emptiness? Was this sullen terror the price of compensation, the badge of normality? Maybe my refusal to fall embodied some deeper thrust than I could then understand. Maybe I had unconsciously seized upon some fundamental resistance to the forces that threatened to overwhelm me. What did it matter that the ground was covered by the thick mats? The tremors I feared were in my heart and soul.

Shame plagued me—and shame is the older brother to disease. Flushing with shame, I would stare down at the mats. I could feel myself wanting to cry out. But I shriveled at the thought of calling more attention to my cowardice. I would finally hear myself whimper, "I'm sorry. But I can't. I can't let go."

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Formless emptiness. A rush of air through which I would plummet toward obliteration. As my "normal" past grew more and more distant, I reached for it more and more desperately, recalling it like some movie whose plot has long since been forgotten but whose scenes continue to comfort through images disconnected from anything but themselves. I remembered that there had been a time when the prospect of falling evoked not terror but joy: football games on the rain-softened autumn turf of Mosholu Parkway, belly-flopping on an American Flyer down its snow-covered slopes in winter, rolling with a pack of friends down one of the steep hills in Bronx Park. Free-falls from the past, testifying not to a loss of the self but to an absence of barriers.

My therapist pleaded, ridiculed, cajoled, threatened, bullied. I was sighed over and railed at. But I couldn't let go and fall. I couldn't sell my terror off so cheaply. Ashamed as I was, I wouldn't allow myself to be bullied out of terror.

A month passed—a month of struggle between me and my therapist. Daily excursions to the rehab room, daily practice runs through the future that was awaiting me. The daily humiliation of discovering that one's own fear had been transformed into a public issue, a subject of discussion among the other boys in the ward, seemed unending.

And then, terror simply evaporated. It was as if I had served enough time in that prison. I was ready to move on. One Tuesday afternoon, as my session ended, the therapist walked resignedly alongside me toward the mats. "All right, Leonard. It's time again. All you have to do is let go and fall." Again, I stood above the mats. Only this time, it was as if something beyond my control or understanding had decided to let my body's fall from grace take me down for good. I was not seized by the usual paroxysm of fear. I didn't feel myself break out in a terrified sweat. It was over.

I don't mean that I suddenly felt myself spring into courage. That wasn't what happened at all. The truth was I had simply been worn down into letting go, like a boxer in whose eyes one recognizes not the flicker of defeat—that issue never having been in doubt—but the acceptance of defeat. Letting go no longer held my imagination captive. I found myself quite suddenly faced with a necessary fall—a fall into life.

So it was that I stood above the mat and heard myself sigh and then felt myself let go, dropping through the quiet air, crutches slipping off to the sides. What I didn't feel this time was the threat of my body slipping into emptiness, so mummified by the terror before it that the touch of air preempted even death. I dropped. I did not crash. I dropped. I did not collapse. I dropped. I did not plummet. I felt myself enveloped by a curiously gentle moment in my life. In that sliver of time before I hit the mat, I was kissed by space.

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My body absorbed the slight shock and I rolled onto my back, braced legs swinging like unguided missiles into the free air, crutches dropping away to the sides. Even as I fell through the air, I could sense the shame and fear drain from my soul, and I knew that my sense of my own cowardice would soon follow. In falling, I had given myself a new start, a new life.

"That's it!" my therapist triumphantly shouted. "You let go! And there it is!"

You let go! And there it is! Yes, and you discover not terror but the only self you are going to be allowed to claim anyhow. You fall free, and then you learn that those padded mats hold not courage but the unclaimed self. And if it turned out to be not the most difficult of tasks, did that make my sense of jubilation any less?

From that moment, I gloried in my ability to fall. Falling became an end in itself. I lost sight of what my therapist had desperately been trying to demonstrate for me—that there was a purpose in learning how to fall. For she wanted to teach me through the fall what I would have to face in the future. She wanted to give me a wholeness I could not give myself. For she knew that mine would be a future so different from what confronts the "normal" that I had to learn to fall into life in order not to be overwhelmed.

From that day, she urged me to practice falling as if I were a religious disciple being urged by a master to practice spiritual discipline. Letting go meant allowing my body to float into space, to turn at the direction of the fall and follow the urgings of emptiness. For her, learning to fall was learning that most essential of American lessons: How to turn incapacity into capacity.

"You were afraid of hurting yourself," she explained to me. "But that's the beauty of it. When you let go, you can't hurt yourself."

An echo of the streets and playgrounds I called home until I met the virus. American slogans: Go with the flow, roll with the punch, slide with the threat until it is no longer a threat. They were simple slogans, and they were all intended to create strength from weakness, a veritable world's fair of compensation.

I returned to the city a year later. By that time, I was a willing convert, one who now secretly enjoyed demonstrating his ability to fall. I enjoyed the surprise that would greet me as I got to my feet, unscathed and undamaged. However perverse it may seem, I felt a certain pleasure when, as I walked with a friend, I felt a crutch slip out of my grasp. Watching the thrust of concern darken his features, I felt myself in control of my own capacity. For falling had become the way my body sought out its proper home. It was an earthbound body, and mine would be an earthbound life. My quest would be for the solid ground beneath me. Falling with confidence, I fell away from terror and fear.

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Of course, some falls took me unawares, and I found myself letting go too late or too early. Bruised in ego and sometimes in body, I would pull myself to my feet to consider what had gone wrong. Yet I was essentially untroubled. Such defeats were part of the game, even when they confined me to bed for a day or two afterward. I was an accountant of pain, and sometimes heavier payment was demanded. In my mid-thirties, I walked my two-year-old son's babysitter home, tripped on the curbstone, and broke my wrist. At forty-eight, an awkward fall triggered by a carelessly unlocked brace sent me smashing against the bathtub and into surgery for a broken femur. It took four months for me to learn to walk on the crutches all over again. But I learned. I already knew how to fall.

I knew such accidents could be handled. After all, pain was not synonymous with mortality. In fact, pain was insurance against an excessive consciousness of mortality. Pain might validate the specific moment in time, but it didn't have very much to do with the future. I did not yet believe that falling into life had anything to do with falling into death. It was simply a way for me to exercise control over my own existence.

It seems to me today that, when I first let my body fall to those mats, I was somehow giving myself the endurance I would need to survive in this world. In a curious way, falling became a way of celebrating what I had lost. My legs were lifeless, useless, but their loss had created a dancing image in whose shadowy gyrations I recognized a strange but potentially interesting new self. I would survive. I knew that now. I could let go, I could fall, and, best of all, I could get up.

To create an independent self, a man had to rid himself both of the myths that nurtured him and the myths that held him back. Learning to fall had been the first lesson in how I yet might live successfully as a cripple. Even disease had its inviolate principles. I understood that the most dangerous threat to the sense of self I needed was an inflated belief in my own capacity. Falling rid a man of excess baggage; it taught him how each of us is dependent on balance.

But what really gave falling legitimacy was the knowledge that I could get to my feet again. That was what made letting go a fall into life. That was what taught me the rules of survival. As long as I could pick myself up and stand on my own two feet, brace-bound and crutch-propped as I was, the fall testified to my ability to live in the here and now, to stake my claim as an American who had turned incapacity into capacity. For such a man, falling might well be considered the language of everyday achievement.

But the day came, as I knew it must come, when I could no longer pick myself up. It was then that my passion for symmetry in endings

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began. On that day, spurred on by another fall, I found myself spinning into the inevitable future.

The day was actually a rainy night in November of 1983. I had just finished teaching at the City College Center for Worker Education, an off-campus degree program for working adults, and had joined some friends for dinner. All of us, I remember, were in a jovial, celebratory mood, although I no longer remember what it was we were celebrating. Perhaps it was simply the satisfaction of being good friends and colleagues at dinner together.

We ate in a Spanish restaurant on Fourteenth Street in Manhattan. It was a dinner that took on, for me at least, the intensity of a time that would assume greater and greater significance as I grew older, one of those watershed moments writers are so fond of. In the dark, rain-swept New York night, change and possibility seemed to drift like a thick fog all around us.

Our mood was still convivial when we left the restaurant around 11:00. The rain had slackened off to a soft drizzle and the street glistened beneath the play of light on the wet black creosote. At night, rain in the city has a way of transforming proportion into optimism. The five of us stood around on the slicked-down sidewalk, none of us willing to be the first to break the richness of the mood by leaving.

Suddenly, the crutch in my left hand began to slip out from under me, slowly, almost deliberately, as if the crutch had a mind of its own and had not yet made the commitment that would send me down. Apparently, I had hit a slick patch of city sidewalk, some nub of concrete worn smooth as medieval stone by thousands of shoppers and panhandlers and tourists and students who daily pounded the bargain hustlings of Fourteenth Street.

Instinctively, I at first tried to fight the fall, to seek for balance by pushing off from the crutch in my right hand. But as I recognized that the fall was inevitable, I simply went slack—and for the thousandth time my body sought vindication in its ability to let go and drop. These good friends had seen me fall before. They knew my childish vanities, understood that I still thought of falling as a way to demonstrate my control of the traps and uncertainties that lay in wait for us all.

Thirty-eight years earlier, I had discovered that I could fall into life simply by letting go. Now I made a different discovery—that I could no longer get to my feet by myself. I hit the wet ground and quickly turned over and pushed up, trying to use one of the crutches as a prop to boost myself to my feet, as I had been taught to do as a boy of twelve.

But try as hard as I could, I couldn't get to my feet. It wasn't that I lacked physical strength. I knew that my arms were as powerful as ever as I pushed down on the wet concrete. It had nothing to do with the fact

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that the street was wet, as my friends insisted later. No, it had to do with a subtle, if mysterious, change in my own sense of rhythm and balance. My body had decided—*and decided on its own, autonomously*—that the moment had come for me to face the question of endings. It was the body that chose its time of recognition.

It was, it seems to me now, a distinctively American moment. It left me pondering limitations and endings and summations. It left me with the curiously buoyant sense that mortality had quite suddenly made itself a felt presence rather than the rhetorical strategy used by the poets and novelists I taught to my students. This was what writers had in mind when they spoke of the truly common fate, this sense of ending coming to one unbidden. This had brought with it my impassioned quest for symmetry. As I lay on the wet ground—no more than a minute or two—all I could think of was how much I wanted my life to balance out. It was as if I were staring into a future in which time itself had evaporated.

Here was a clear, simple perception, and there was nothing mystical about it. There are limitations we recognize and those that recognize us. My friends, who had nervously been standing around while I tried to get to my feet, finally asked if they could help me up. "You'll have to," I said. "I can't get up any other way."

Two of them pulled me to my feet while another jammed the crutches beneath my arms, as the therapist and the two bracemakers had done almost four decades earlier. When I was standing, they proceeded to joke about my sudden incapacity in that age-old way men of all ages have, as if words might codify loss and change and time's betrayal. I joined in the joking. But what I really wanted was to go home and contemplate this latest fall in the privacy of my apartment. The implications were clear: I would never again be an eater of salt, I would also never again get to my feet on my own. A part of my life had ended. But that didn't depress me. In fact, I felt almost as exhilarated as I had thirty-eight years earlier, when my body surrendered to the need to let go and I fell into life.

Almost four years have passed since I fell on the wet sidewalk of Fourteenth Street. I suppose it wasn't a particularly memorable fall. It wasn't even particularly significant to anyone who had not once fallen into life. But it was inevitable, the first time I had let go into a time when it would no longer even be necessary to let go.

It was a fall that left me with the knowledge that I could no longer pick myself up. That meant I now needed the help of others as I had not needed their help before. It was a fall that left me burning with this strange passion for symmetry, this desire to balance my existence out. When the day comes, I want to be able to fall into my death as nakedly as I once had to fall into my life.

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Do not misunderstand me. I am not seeking a way out of mortality, for I believe in nothing more strongly than I believe in the permanency of endings. I am not looking for a way out of this life, a life I continue to find immensely enjoyable—even if I can no longer pull myself to my own two feet. Of course, a good deal in my life has changed. For one thing, I am increasingly impatient with those who claim to have no use for endings of any sort. I am also increasingly embarrassed by the thought of the harshly critical adolescent I was, self-righteously convinced that the only way for a man to go to his end was by kicking and screaming.

But these are, I suppose, the kinds of changes any man or woman of forty or fifty would feel. Middle-aged skepticism is as natural as adolescent acne. In my clearer, less passionate moments, I can even laugh at my need for symmetry in beginnings and endings as well as my desire to see my own eventual death as a line running parallel to my life. Even in mathematics, let alone life, symmetry is sometimes too neat, too closed off from the way things actually work. After all, it took me a full month before I could bring myself to let go and fall into life.

I no longer talk about how one can seize a doctrine of compensation from disease. I don't talk about it, but it still haunts me. In my heart, I believe it offers a man the only philosophy by which he can actually live. It is the only philosophy that strips away both spiritual mumbo jumbo and the procrustean weight of existential anxiety. In the final analysis, a man really is what a man does.

Believing as I do, I wonder why I so often find myself trying to frame a perspective that will prove adequate to a proper sense of ending. Perhaps that is why I find myself sitting in a bar with a friend, trying to explain to him all that I have learned from falling. "There must be a time," I hear myself tell him, "when a man has the right to stop thinking about falling."

"Sure," my friend laughs. "Four seconds before he dies."

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Hide and Seek

Greg Moss

Ready or not
I would search the
Green hedge and the
Narrow path by

The edge of the
House. But here you
Are, red knickers
Blaring behind

The skinny elm
Tree, a giggle
Bounding from your
Young voice like a

Squirrel. So I
Catch you again,
And we start all
Over: I count

To ten and you
Hide openly.
No, it's no fun
To really hide.

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That's why I play
The game with you.
Being found is
Where the fun is.

So why do we hide
In the thickets
Of the heart, and
Count the days since

Love last touched us
Free? We grow old,
Shed the knickers
And the bright grin

When we should jump
Out from behind,
Laugh in the wind,
Shout to be found.

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Talk Show

The Rise of the Literary Interview

BRUCE BAWER

Yet from none of these men, in conversation,
did I learn a critical thing.
—Donald Hall, *Remembering Poets*

My first interview took place when I was twenty-four, a graduate teaching assistant in English. I had the most tenuous possible claim to fame: I'd just published a newspaper op-ed piece—a modest forerunner to E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*—in which I'd complained about how ignorant my undergraduate composition students were of even the most fundamental facts of history, geography, and the like. Somehow, the news director of the university radio station got wind of this article and decided to interview me on the air. "Controversial topic," he growled at me over the phone. "Hard-hitting." "Should I prepare anything?" I asked, in obsequious grad-student fashion. "Hell, no!" he barked. "Last thing we want is something prepared. Just talk off the cuff." When I showed up for the taping session, his only words of advice were, "Act natural."

Well, I acted natural, and I suppose it went well enough; my interviewer told me afterwards that I had come across as "very relaxed, very natural," and apparently this—along with the fact that my topic had been "controversial" and my approach "hard-hitting"—was all that mattered. Whether I had actually said anything worth listening to seemed to be relatively unimportant. In any event, once it was over, there were two things I knew for certain: first, that so far as I had managed to sound relaxed and natural, I'd been guilty of manufacturing an illusion; and second, that although most of what I'd said during the interview had indeed come off the top of my head, in those moments when I'd spoken to the point most clearly and succinctly there had been no spontaneity on my part whatsoever. On the contrary, I'd been working from a script—reciting from memory, that is, the words of my op-ed piece. This realization made me wonder why on earth radio listeners should be asked (and why, for that matter, should they be willing) to spend half an hour of their lives listening to an extemporaneous conversation on the subject of college students' ignorance—an interview that by the very nature of its form was bound to be characterized by inexact diction and needless repetition, among other infelicities—when they could instead, in the space of two minutes, read my article, in which I'd said everything I had to say on the subject in the best words I could find? In the twenty-eight minutes that the audience saved by reading the essay instead of listening to the interview, they could read half-a-dozen Wallace Stevens poems they'd never had time for, or listen to a recording of the Waldstein Sonata, or study a map of Eurasia or a diagram of the Krebs cycle or, for that matter, make love. Who was I to take up their valuable time with my unpremeditated yammering?

This was, I now realize, a foolish question.

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For it has become clear to me in the intervening years that, in these peculiar times, unpremeditated yammering—whether it is recorded on audiotape, videotape, or good old-fashioned paper—is one of those things of which we Americans simply cannot get enough. Interviews, in short, are hot. To glance at the television listings is to recognize that it is possible to spend upwards of ten hours a day watching almost nothing else. On a typical weekday in the New York metropolitan area, for instance, you can follow two hours of chatter on "Good Morning America," say, with an hour of "Geraldo" or of something called "The Morning Show," a half-hour of "Best Talk in Town," an hour of "Hour Magazine," an hour with either Phil Donahue or Oprah Winfrey (or both, if you choose to tape one for later viewing), and an hour of "Live at Five." In the evening, there's a variety of interview programs to choose from, including "Nightline" and "The Tonight Show"; for late-late television viewers, there are four straight hours of "CBS News Nightwatch"; and on the weekend, there's an endless stream of political interview programs, both national and local, along the lines of "Meet the Press." Although their titles may suggest that they consist principally of news or some sort of entertainment, these shows are mostly composed of interviews, one after another—interviews with TV stars and Vegas headliners, with public officials and opinion makers, with psychiatrists, sociologists, educators, clergymen, "experts" of every kind. And even, here and there, a few interviews with writers.

It doesn't seem much of an exaggeration, indeed, to say that, in America in the 1980s, the interview is an even hotter form than the music video. This is no less the case in the pages of the literary magazines than it is on the television screen. Forty years ago, in the heyday of the *Partisan* and *Kenyon* reviews, literary interviews were all but unheard of in the pages of serious journals; then, in 1953, George Plimpton founded the *Paris Review*, and nothing has been quite the same since. The second half of its title notwithstanding, from the very beginning the *Paris Review*'s editors held to a policy of not publishing critical essays or reviews. Instead, they ran literary interviews—a brilliant way to get the names of gigantically famous writers on the cover without having to pay gigantic fees for their work. And famous writers were, as it turned out, more than willing to cooperate. The interviews gave them an opportunity to promote their work, to settle old scores, to get their opinions into print without having to write about them. The interviews let them talk about themselves—and what could appeal more strongly to the average writer's ego? The first issue of the *Paris Review* contained an interview with E. M. Forster; another early number featured the now-famous conversation with Ernest Hemingway. These and other such interviews, published (usually) two to an issue, brought the magazine considerable early recognition at relatively little expense. In fact, they brought it a degree of fame that one cannot imagine it having attained on the basis of the poetry and fiction that have appeared in its pages. Other small-magazine editors took note, and during the sixties and seventies the *Paris Review*'s emphasis on literary interviews rather than critical essays was imitated widely.

Though scores of literary magazines nowadays routinely publish interviews with writers, the *Paris Review*'s contributions continue to be markedly more admirable than most. Part of the reason for this, I think, is that the *Paris Review* does something that might be considered cheating: it treats the interview transcript not as a sacred document to be presented verbatim, but as a piece of copy which, like everything else that goes into the magazine, is open to editing, tightening, revision. In addition to doing their own blue-penciling, moreover, the editors allow the writer being interviewed to make changes. The interview text itself, unlike most published literary magazine interviews, often represents more than one encounter between the parties; in many instances, if an interview is deemed too thin, the interviewer is dispatched a second time, and perhaps even a third, to pose further questions.

The *Paris Review*, in other words, does not go in for what a friend of mine refers to as the "interview vérité." That's the sort of interview in which not only the subject's every word is dutifully transcribed, but also his sneezes, coughs, laughs, *um*'s, and *ah*'s are reverently recorded for the enlightenment of future generations. This sort of interview came into vogue in the sixties, thrived in the seventies, and has faded a bit in the eighties, though ludicrous examples of it may still be

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found here and there. Take, for example, this excerpt from an interview that the poet Tim Dlugos conducted with the poet Michael Lally for a 1980 issue of a magazine called *Little Caesar:*

TD: . . . What's your favorite color?
ML: It's um, uh . . . I'm looking for a new one.
TD: (Laughs)
ML: It's obviously been blue. For a number of years. I remember in the Fifties, it was red and black. Then it was pink and grey. Then it was grey and black, with a little olive drab. Then it became blue, and it's been blue ever since.
TD: What's your favorite T.V. show?
ML: That's a good question. Old movies. But, obviously, they don't qualify as T.V. shows, let me think a second. (long pause) I don't have a favorite at the moment, except now it's just specials.
TD: What's your favorite food?
ML: It's always been chicken. That's easy to answer.
TD: Okay (laughs)
ML: What's my favorite gender? (laughs) What's my favorite . . . uh . . . (laughs)
TD: That's a good question. What's your favorite gender? (long pause) Well, which do you like better, going to bed with men or going to bed with women?
ML: (pause) Women . . . (pause) in terms of the whole procedure. (pause) In my fantasies, it's mixed . . . now. Although up until my thirties it was always predominantly, almost exclusively women. I find women easier in some ways to approach and get along with and I find the whole sexual encounter with them more familiar and more acceptable to my style and so on. I have difficulties with that too though, I mean I went to bed with a woman the other night who's about as straight a woman as I've been to bed with in a long time . . . "been to bed with" . . . I hate that expression, but I don't know how else to put it. . . .

Interviews vérité seem more often to involve poets than fiction writers. Wendell Berry, in an astute essay on contemporary poetry for the *Hudson Review*, makes a few observations that, though they are not explicitly concerned with the interview vérité, nonetheless help explain the popularity of this subgenre among poets and their interviewers. To Berry's mind, the "sudden rise and growth" of the literary interview "suggests, as a sort of implied premise, that poets are of a different kind from other people; hence the interest in what they *say* as opposed to what they write." Berry speaks of "a class of what might be called poet watchers," whose purpose in watching poets is not to hear what they have to say about poetry but to "*examine* the poet, to *study* as unobtrusively as possible whatever privacies may be disclosed by the inadvertencies of conversation." The interview vérité is plainly a symptom of this sort of writer-worship gone berserk; and the writer-worship is in turn symptomatic of that perverse post–Beat Generation mentality that views the poet less as an artist—a human being using his craft, intelligence, and talent to create an ordered, controlled work of art—than as a prophet, a visionary, a seer, whose every act and utterance is taken to be of nearly scriptural significance. It's a mentality that doesn't understand how enormous the difference is between writing and talking—a mentality that doesn't appreciate the thought, the rewriting, the shaping that go into a coherent, unified literary composition.

Some of the best *Paris Review* interviews are so far removed from the verbatim transcripts of the *Little Caesar* type that they might not even be considered "interviews" at all, in the strictest sense. Though, in the most recent edition of *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, the majority of conversations are conventional in format—May Sarton, Eugène Ionesco, Elizabeth Hardwick, Arthur Koestler, and William Maxwell were each apparently interviewed in one sitting, and Malcolm Cowley was interviewed twice—there are a number of departures from this standard operating procedure. John Ashbery, for instance, was interviewed once, with "a few additional questions . . . asked and answered" on later occasions and "incorporated into the whole." John Barth was interviewed on television by Plimpton, and the transcript of this exchange, being deemed "a bit short by the usual standards of the magazine," especially given that Barth was such a "master of the prolix" (!), was forwarded to Barth with additional questions to answer (although instead of complying, Barth shortened the text he'd been sent). Milan Kundera met with his interviewer, Christian Salmon, several times; but, as Salmon informs readers in his brief introduction, "instead of a tape recorder, we used a typewriter, scissors, and glue. Gradually, amid discarded scraps of paper and after several revisions, this text emerged." The interview with Raymond Carver was conducted partly by mail, and—most

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radical of all—the one with Philip Larkin entirely by mail.

What these latest few incarnations of the *Paris Review* interview demonstrate is that a literary interview can come into being in any number of ways, so long as the end result reads like a conversation—preferably a spontaneous, informal conversation—between the author being scrutinized and the interviewer. Whether such a conversation ever took place is immaterial. Though there is something to be said, I suppose, for a strict constructionist's view of this modus operandi—for the argument, in other words, that a literary interview that is not the record of a real, live, face-to-face interview is not a bona fide interview at all—what's interesting to me is that, of all the above-mentioned interviews, the one that I consider by far the best is the one whose subject never even so much as met his interviewer. I refer to the interview with Philip Larkin, which Robert Phillips conducted by mail in 1981–82, and which contains this memorable exchange:

INTERVIEWER: How did you arrive upon the image of a toad for work or labor?

LARKIN: Sheer genius.

To say that such-and-such an interview is the best in the book, however, is to be confronted immediately with a not-so-easy question—namely, by what criteria do I deem this interview to be the best? Or, to put it more broadly, what critical standards should properly be brought to bear upon any literary interview? It's a fair question, for no one seems ever to have answered, in anything even remotely approaching a definitive manner, the intimately related and equally difficult question of just what a literary interview is. Is the literary interview, for example, itself a literary form? Can it be art? (An interesting distinction; in the epigraph to his book *Conversations with Capote,* a compilation of interviews with the late writer-celebrity, Lawrence Grobel asks, "Do you think that remarks can be literature?" Capote responds, "No, but they can be art.") Or is the literary interview at best only an entertaining hodgepodge of personality, public relations, and primary source material? Why do we read such things, anyway? Why *should* we read them—or should we perhaps take a cue from the editors of the very best literary magazines, such as *Poetry* and the *Hudson Review,* and not bother with them in the first place?

All of these complex questions can be summarized in one simple question: how seriously should we take the literary interview? Certainly the participants in many an interview take the form very seriously indeed. Again, this seems to be especially true of poets. Forty years ago, a poet with something to say about a poem, another poet, or poetry in general would write an essay; since the 1960s, however, it has become increasingly common for poets to air their literary opinions and theories not in essays but in interviews. With a few notable exceptions, poets don't *write* anymore. If you find it difficult to believe this, look at some of the books in the University of Michigan's "Poets on Poetry" series, the purpose of which is to present literary criticism by notable American poets. In one volume after another of this series, the interviews outnumber the essays; even extremely distinguished poets who have been publishing poetry for decades—some of whom I, for one, admire enormously—prove on inspection to have produced a shockingly small body of critical prose.

Frequently, in such para-critical (as one might call them) interviews, the questioner is also a poet, no less well known than his subject, and hardly any less talkative; sometimes no distinction at all is made between interviewer and interviewee, and the text is described not as an interview but as a "dialogue." Although these interviews may concern philosophical and aesthetic issues, one cannot get away from the fact that they are interviews, not essays; one is manifestly expected to excuse the repetitions, non sequiturs, logical inconsistencies, lapses in diction, and argumentative weaknesses because this isn't somebody writing but rather a transcript of two people talking.

Yet how profound these interview-happy poets try to sound! It's peculiar that the most brilliant and learned poet-critics of mid-century—people like Randall Jarrell and Delmore Schwartz—wrote essays on poetry that were lucid, engaging, and unpretentious; but many a third-rate poet of the present day seems unable to so much as talk about his art without pouring forth the most astounding banalities, couched in the most breathtakingly pretentious terms. Often the poet's purpose in

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these interviews seems to be not to convey an opinion or insight but to impress the reader with his vocabulary, learning, and ability to string together grandiose abstractions like beads on a string. Perhaps the most remarkable examples of the form are the ones in which both interviewer and interviewee go the pompous, verbose route. Take, for example, an interview that appeared in the fall 1986 issue of the *Seneca Review*. The interviewer is a poet named David Wojahn; the subject is David St. John, another poet. Let's join them in medias res:

> DS: . . . I think every poem has to be alert to history, both the history of literature and the history of the world. Every poem has to be conscious of the culture in which it is framed, though that doesn't mean that every poem need exhibit an argument about topical matters. It seems to me the most interesting poetry is poetry that investigates the way the human mind performs and responds to history and experience.
>
> DW: One of my reasons for asking that question is a sense I have in your work that artifice is seen as the force that defines our universe, that mitigates our existence, and that prevents our experience from being tragic and overwhelming, and I sometimes feel that that very kind of needful embrace of artifice is what allows you to achieve success with strategies and stylistic techniques that in the work of other poets might seem strained or mannered.
>
> DS: Well, I hope that's true.

This sort of thing is not literary discourse—it's two poets showing off, pure and simple.

Every so often, to be sure, one comes across a literary interview that seems genuinely valuable—an interview that, if one were teaching an undergraduate course about the writer, one might well add to the reading list. A fine example is a brief interview that David Stern conducted with Robert Fitzgerald for *Sequoia* in 1976. It is a no-nonsense conversation in which Stern asks about Fitzgerald's method of translating Homer, about the development of the verse form used in his translations, about his opinion of other translations, and about the possible influences upon him of Pound and Stevens. Stern poses such questions as, "What are the most important things to try to keep from the original Greek in an English translation?" Fitzgerald's answers are clear, taut, straightforward, carefully worded, and fitted out, where necessary, with well-chosen examples:

> D.S.: What kind of liberties did you feel you were allowed to take in your translations and what kind of liberties did you feel that you could not take?
>
> R.F.: Translating is finding equivalents. When I was at work on *The Odyssey*, I had to find them. For example, I had been puzzled, as everyone had for centuries, by the epithet given to Nestor—"Lord of Pylos, Warden of Achaeans." In what sense he was warden of Achaeans puzzled everyone. I found among the palace tablets a list of categories of people employed by the palace. When I saw that among these categories were coast watchers, I knew I had found the answer. Pylos was on the west coast of the Peloponnesus and we knew that sea raiders were very common in those centuries among those waters. What was more natural than that there should be coast watchers detailed in the keeping of the palace? This was something for which a modern equivalent might be found. I found it in the list of titles of the commanding admirals in the Second World War. In England there was a whole command of destroyers and destroyer escorts operating out of their West Coast to spot German submarines in the sea lanes leading to the British Isles. The name of that command was "The Lord of the Western Approaches." So Nestor became "The Lord of the Western Approaches to Achaea," and I knew I had my equivalent for him.

Few literary interviews, alas, are this serious and useful. Far from providing reliable information, most subjects of literary interviews are congenitally foggy about names, dates, titles, and such. In a *Paris Review* interview, for instance, Tennessee Williams declares that William Inge wrote "an enormously brilliant work"—but Williams can't remember the title: "*Natural Affection*, or something like that." Errors of transcription are also common. Thus, in the Tennessee Williams interview, Hemingway's story "A Simple Enquiry" becomes "A Simple Inquiry," Sheilah Graham becomes Sheila, and Elinor Wylie becomes Eleanor. Of course, errors of this variety may be found in critical essays too; but they seem to occur more frequently in literary interviews and to be taken far less seriously by all concerned. Indeed, there seems to be an unspoken understanding among interviewers, editors, and readers that literary interviews should not be held to the

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same standards of accuracy as, say, literary essays. Even if an interview subject misrepresents the truth, his questioner will almost certainly not contradict him. Why not? Because he couldn't care less about the truth. What literary interviewers are after is not truth but sheer portraiture. So what, their logic seems to run, if the interview subject gets his facts wrong, contradicts himself, or fails to support an argument adequately? That's *him*—and to try to correct his facts, or to ask him to rethink his argument, would only be to stifle his individuality, to muck up the character portrait.

In many an editorial office, in fact, a writer's value as an interview subject seems to be directly proportionate to the outrageousness, immoderation, and irresponsibility of his remarks. So at least it would appear from the publication, in recent years, of two grotesque compilations: Lawrence Grobel's *Conversations with Capote* (NAL, 1985) and Robert J. Stanton and Gore Vidal's *Views from a Window: Conversations with Gore Vidal* (Lyle Stuart, 1980). Whatever one might think of Capote's and of Vidal's fiction, it is obvious that they were made the subjects of such books not because their writings tower over those of their contemporaries but because both of them are notorious for saying sensational things. Even more than most writers, Capote and Vidal relish the interview as an opportunity to brag, to show off, to settle old scores and trash the competition with some *ad hominem* name-calling. The "literary criticism" in these two interview books, accordingly, is for the most part of the crudest variety (which is a marked contrast, one should add, to Vidal's often highly accomplished literary essays). In a chapter called "Contemporaries," for instance, Capote shoots spitballs at one after another of his fellow novelists: Kesey is "dead," Kerouac "was a joke," Bellow "is a nothing writer," Malamud is "unreadable." Updike? "I hate him." As for Joyce Carol Oates,

> She's a joke monster who ought to be beheaded in a public auditorium or in Shea or in a field with hundreds of thousands. *(Laughs.)* She does all the graffiti in the men's room and the women's room and in every public toilet from here to California and back, stopping in Seattle on her way! *(Laughs.)* To me, she's the most loathsome creature in America. . . .
>
> *Has she ever said or written anything about you to deserve such vituperation?*
>
> Yes, she's written me a fan letter. She's written me extreme fan letters. But that's the kind of hoax she is. I bet there's not a writer in America that's ever had their name in print that she hasn't written a fan letter to. I think she's that kind of person . . . or creature . . . or whatever. She's so . . . oooogh! *(Shudders.)*

So long as one is not on Capote's list of victims, this sort of thing makes entertaining reading. But after a while the utter lack of substance wears one down, and Capote's cattiness seems merely depressing. Can this really, one wonders, be the testament of a major American writer? What is wrong with a literary scene capable of producing such a document? What warped set of values in America's editorial offices could possibly have resulted in the placing of such nonsense between hard covers?

Cattiness, it should be noted, is not the exclusive province of American writers. Nearly all literary interviewees, foreign and domestic, have something to say about their fellows, and whereas young and ambitious writers tend to dole out more politic praise than tough criticism, many older writers specialize in snappy put-downs. In the course of her *Paris Review* interview, for instance, Rebecca West makes mention of Somerset Maugham, who "couldn't write for toffee, bless his heart"; of Leonard Woolf, who "had a tiresome mind" ("But he was certainly good to Virginia"); of Arnold Bennett, who "was a horrible mean-spirited hateful man"; and of George Bernard Shaw, who possessed "a poor mind, I think." As for Yeats,

> He wasn't a bit impressive and he wasn't my sort of person at all. He boomed at you like a foghorn. He was there one time when Philip Guedalla and two or three of us were all very young, and were talking nonsense about murderers in Shakespeare and whether a third murderer ever became a first murderer by working hard or were they, sort of, hereditary slots? Were they like Japanese specialists and one did one kind of murder, another did another? It was really awfully funny. Philip was very funny to be with. Then we started talking about something on the Western isles but Yeats wouldn't join in, until we fussed round and were nice to him. But we were all wrong. What he liked was solemnity and, if you were big enough, heavy enough, and strong enough, he loved you. He loved great big women. He would have been mad about Vanessa Redgrave.

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So much for the greatest poet of the century. This passage is of course vintage cantankerous, dotty old English literary lady, but in a sense it is a classic literary interview excerpt: one part valuable (the modest addition to the trove of Yeatsiana), one part ridiculous (the remark about how much less fun Yeats was to be with than Philip Guedalla), one part entertaining (the joke about murderers in Shakespeare), and one part utterly bizarre (the mention of Miss Redgrave).

It is rather refreshing to remember that for every know-it-all, like Capote or West, there is a *faux-naif* like Larkin:

INTERVIEWER: Is Jorge Luis Borges the only other contemporary poet of note who is also a librarian, by the way? Are you aware of any others?
LARKIN: Who is Jorge Luis Borges?

To read an interview with a writer like Larkin is to appreciate the literary interview as a legitimate means of getting a glimpse of an extremely unusual personality—in this case, a personality that is crabbed yet somehow charming. Elizabeth Bishop is likewise an appealing interview subject, sensible and lady-like and truly modest: "There's nothing more embarrassing than being a poet, really." Isaac Bashevis Singer is also delightful, in the manner of a grouchy grandfather:

INTERVIEWER:
Sin is more interesting than virtue. That's what George Bernard Shaw said.
SINGER:
We didn't need George Bernard Shaw to say it.

William Goyen is gentlemanly and reflective, as demonstrated by this *pensée*, a part of his memory of his friend Carson McCullers's writing block:

It was a murderous thing, a death blow, that block. She said she just didn't have anything to write. And really, it was as though she had never written. This happens to writers when there are dead spells. We die sometimes. And it's as though we're in a tomb; it's a death. That's what we all fear, and that's why so many of us become alcoholics or suicides or insane—or just no-good philanderers.

William Maxwell, too, is a gentleman, just as sensitive, mild-mannered, and unpretentious as his wonderful novel *The Folded Leaf* might lead one to expect; one immediately likes him as much as one likes his work. But Maxwell is an exception; usually there's surprisingly little correlation between one's opinion of a writer's oeuvre and one's reaction to his personality as it comes across in a literary interview. However exquisite much of Capote's fiction may be, it is difficult to like him as a person; on the other hand, Stephen Spender is so genially candid about the mediocrity of his own work ("Auden was much better than I") that it's hard to dislike him much. One can take the humble act too far, though: Kurt Vonnegut tries so hard to come off as a regular guy—telling dumb jokes, calling himself a "hack," and describing writing ostentatiously as a "trade"—that it seems a bit too much like slumming. But then one of the pleasures of literary interviews is watching writers (not all, but some) straining desperately to come off a certain way.

The foremost reason most writers agree so readily to grant interviews, of course, is that literary interviews are a splendid way to promote themselves. Many a big literary gun—the names of Vidal and Philip Roth, to mention two, spring instantly to mind—have developed this variety of media exploitation to a high art. (It might be convincingly argued, in fact, that it is in the fine art of publicity that such celebrity writers as these demonstrate their greatest gifts.) Far from merely using the literary interview, as movie stars use the television talk show, to plug their latest products, "name" writers like Vidal and Roth are out to establish the terms in which these products will be discussed by critics, to determine the criteria by which they will be judged. For example, when in the June 1987 *Interview* magazine Vidal discourses upon *Empire*—his historical novel set in America during the Theodore Roosevelt era—he seems eager to ensure that reviewers will dwell not upon its fictional artistry (or lack thereof) but rather upon its value as a history lesson. "I am the history teacher to the country," Vidal claims, adding that, in the series of novels of which *Empire* is a part, "I've redreamed the entire history of the Republic."

Not all interview subjects are as effective as Vidal at stage-managing their conversations. As often as not, interviewers retain the upper hand. Which topics they choose to dwell upon varies from one to the other. Some interviewers want to delve into what it means to be a woman writer, a black writer, an English

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writer, a homosexual writer. Daniel Stern asks Bernard Malamud: "Does this idea or theme, as you call it, come out of your experience as a Jew?" (And later: "Are you a Jewish writer?" Malamud: "What is the question asking?") Rebecca West's interviewer keeps asking questions that contain the word *woman* (and no wonder, because when one turns to the interviewer's biographical note, one discovers that she is the author of feminist studies of the Virgin Mary and Joan of Arc, and "is currently working on a study of female form in allegory"). More often than not, the interviewer is more interested than the interviewee in discussing such matters and tends to press on (as West's interviewer does) long after the author has clearly grown tired of the topic.

This is, needless to say, a mark of bad interviewing. One of the things a good interviewer must be able to sense is that it's time to move on. He must have good instincts, too, about the next turn the interview should take, must have the sensitivity and savvy to follow his subject's line of thought, and must be able to ask intelligent follow-up questions when the occasion arises. A good interviewer must know as much as possible about his subject, but must not wear that knowledge on his sleeve. He must have enough in common with his subject to make possible a meeting of the minds, but must be different enough to get something interesting going; he must balance sophistication with curiosity, respect with skepticism.

And he must ask the right questions. Naturally, most interview questions are familiar ones. Probably 90 percent of the conversations in 90 percent of literary interviews revolve around the same handful of topics: writing habits (What time of day do you write? How many drafts? Is it hard? Is it fun? Do you use a pencil, typewriter, or computer?); personal history (What was your childhood like? How autobiographical is your work?); other writers (What do you think of them? Which ones have influenced you?) and literature in general. And then there is that broad category of questions about the subject's social, political, ethical, and philosophical ideas. Usually, these are the questions that separate the men from the boys. Some distinguished authors, when they talk about non-literary ideas, are quite impressive; others are so blinkered, narcissistic, and just plain fatuous that they remind one of starlets holding forth on "The Tonight Show." When Tennessee Williams praises Fidel Castro's regime, for example, it's plain that he's doing so mainly because, when he went to Cuba, Castro knew who he was, treated him with respect, and "introduced me to the Cuban cabinet. . . . When he introduced us, he turned to me and said, 'Oh, that *cat!*' and winked. He meant *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, of course. I found that very engaging." As for President Carter, the major fault Williams found with him was that he ran a dry White House: "We were only allowed to have one very small glass of what was purported to be a California chablis." And here—just to show Williams, in his *Paris Review* interview, attempting to develop a serious critical thought—is the complete text of a section of the interview entitled "The State of the Culture":

> Literature has taken a back seat to the television, don't you think? It really has. We don't have a culture anymore that favors the creation of writers, or supports them very well. I mean, serious artists. On Broadway, what they want are cheap comedies and musicals and revivals. It's nearly impossible to get serious work even produced, and then it's lucky to have a run of a week. They knocked Albee's *Lolita* down horribly. I've never read such cruel reviews. But I felt it was a mistake for Albee to do adaptations. He's brilliant doing his own original work. But even so, I think there's a way of expressing one's critical displeasures with a play without being quite so hard, quite so cruel. The critics are literally killing writers.

The principal emotion that one experiences when reading a passage such as this is embarrassment—embarrassment for Williams, for American drama, for literature. Would such silly, incoherent observations as these ever be allowed into print in any other context than a literary interview?

Complain as we may, the literary interview continues to increase in prominence. In the past few years, whole volumes of them have proliferated. In 1984, Alfred A. Knopf published Charles Ruas's *Conversations with American Writers* (among the subjects, unsurprisingly, are Capote, Vidal, Mailer, and Williams); in 1987, the University of Illinois Press issued *Alive and Writing: Interviews with American Authors of the 1980s*. (Editing volumes of literary interviews is apparently

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developing into a favorite, and respectable, scholarly pursuit; one of the two editors of *Alive and Writing* is a Professor Larry McCaffery of San Diego State University, who has also co-edited *Anything Can Happen: Interviews with Contemporary American Novelists.*) The already-mentioned books of interviews with Vidal and Capote have been joined by an entire series of book-length "literary conversations" with individual writers (including Flannery O'Connor and Katherine Anne Porter) published by the University of Mississippi Press. A form of literary interview that has become especially popular in the 1980s is the sort in which the subject himself is not interviewed—or, at least, is only one of many persons interviewed. I am speaking of the "oral biography," in which the biographical subject is portrayed not by a single biographer, who has sifted through the primary sources and formed a coherent vision of one man's life and character, but by a number of people who knew the subject; on such projects it is the job of the "biographer" (if such a word can even be used) to record, transcribe, edit, and put into some order these people's taped remarks about the subject. Peter Brazeau's *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered* (1983) is one example thereof; Peter Manso's *Mailer: His Life and Times* (1985) is another. Just as the interview form has, then, in the past couple of decades, taken the place of the critical essay in the oeuvres of many poets, it has likewise, in recent years, begun to move in on the territory of the literary biography. Taken together, all of these developments—anthologies of interviews, book-length interviews, and oral biographies—are an ominous sign that in the 1980s, even when the topic at hand is literature, real writing is increasingly giving way to talking disguised as writing.

In his introduction to volume four of *Writers at Work* (1976), Wilfred Sheed notes that, in a review of volume two, he had complained "that the information contained therein was neither better nor worse than Hollywood gossip." But the complaint, he confesses, was "dishonest . . . in that I artfully concealed how much I had enjoyed the volume—which meant it had some kind of value, if not the kind I was looking for. It was also an ingenuous piece because I did not yet realize that gossip is the very stuff of literature, the *materia prima* of which both books and their authors are made." (Note also Truman Capote in *Conversations with Capote:* "All literature . . . is gossip.") Sheed goes on to say that a literary interview is worthwhile because it affords us a glimpse of the author in the act of "self-creation," of fashioning his own image; and he claims that what distinguishes writers from Hollywood movie actors—and what therefore makes literary interviews, despite their preoccupation with trivial details, more valuable than interviews with movie actors—is that an author "knows, as movie actors do not, that such details can immortalize a character." This argument seems to me extraordinarily misguided: if there's anything that movie actors do know about, it is the manufacturing of images and the fixing of characters in the public consciousness.

As for Sheed's point that all literature is gossip, I suppose in the broadest sense this could be said to be true; but one must distinguish between the high gossip of *Hamlet* and the low gossip of Liz Smith's column, and one must recognize that the literary interview is closer to the latter than to the former. Whereas reading almost anything "literary" requires a certain level of concentration, reading literary interviews is mostly very much like reading Liz Smith, or for that matter watching television.

Yet Sheed does have a point. Literary interviews can be fun to read, and it would be dishonest not to admit, even while one is decrying the form for its vulgarities and pretensions, that one has been much entertained by them. And there's nothing *wrong* with being entertained by them. The important thing is to admit that most of the time, one is merely being entertained and not edified—to acknowledge that the majority of literary interviews fall squarely into the same category as movie-star biographies, literary party gossip, talk radio, and "Entertainment Tonight." And to recognize, even as one is enjoying oneself, that one's time would really be much better spent reading the fiction, poetry, or plays for which these people are famous, than poring over a published transcript of their extemporaneous chatter.

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For Philip Larkin

LOLETTE KUBY

Frightening to one who lives
alone, the thought of the sudden trip
to emergency. Unexpected
death under the knife hardly worse
than imagining the unknown doctor
attempting to locate a cousin
or some friend, who, found,
would be dismayed to learn a week had passed,
a week in which one had been
pictured (if thought of at all)
in the satisfying boredom
of a bachelor's routed rounds,
a week since, gasping for air,
one may have talked into the line
that opens in The Nearest Hospital,
summoning rescue.
No children, never married,
an only child oneself, there's no one
for anyone to send condolence to.
But if one is poet laureate
of consternation, demographer
of the common woe, the world's eyes
are smudged with one's obituary,
and one's voice is left behind, difficult
to describe as the taste of tomato.

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The Achievement of Constance Garnett

CHARLES A. MOSER

The qualifications for a translator are to be in sympathy with the author he is translating, and most important of all to be in love with words and interested in all their meanings.
—Constance Garnett, 1946

Nearly a century has now elapsed since European and American intellectuals first became aware of the riches of nineteenth-century Russian literature. Perhaps the single most striking signal of that awakening was the appearance of Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé's collection of essays entitled *Le Roman russe,* published in France in 1886 and in English translation the next year. De Vogüé's book served as a guide to the serious European inquirer into the history of Russian literature, who had up until that time had nothing of the sort available.

But de Vogüé's work was not the only indication of a greater interest in things Russian then. The decade between 1885 and 1895 also saw the debuts of two extraordinary translators who would play key roles in introducing English and American readers to Russian literature directly: America's Isabel Hapgood (1850–1928) and England's Constance Garnett (1861–1946).

Hapgood, Garnett's senior by eleven years, entered the literary arena proportionately earlier than Garnett. A native of Boston, she had no formal higher education but taught herself German, French, and Russian, as well as several other less-common languages at a time when teaching materials for Russian were very scarce. Her initial translations from Russian appeared in 1886; the following year she traveled to Russia for the first time, describing her visit in her book *Russian Rambles* (1895). She never married and thus was free to make a career of translating major and minor Russian, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and Polish authors. She also had critical ambitions, bringing out *A Survey of Russian Literature* in 1902 and later serving as foreign correspondent and reviewer for the *Nation* and the New York *Evening Post.* By the time of her death she had published a tremendous body of work.

And yet today, when we think of English translators of Russian literature, we remember Isabel Hapgood primarily as a historical figure, one whose efforts have been largely superseded. We recall Constance Garnett, on the other hand, not only for her historical contributions to the field, but as a translator whose work remains relevant to us in a way in which that of Isabel Hapgood is not.

Born in Brighton as Constance Black, one of eight children in a not particularly remarkable family (although a sister of hers was a novelist), Constance was educated at Newnham College, Cambridge, and was among the first women to graduate there. In her youth she espoused rather progressive views, although, according to her biographer Carolyn Heilbrun, she became considerably more conserv-

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ative toward the end of her life. She has been accused—for example, by the *New Republic* in its obituary tribute to her—of propagating Victorian "prejudices and pruderies," but in fact her personal outlook was not particularly Victorian: for example, she thought the social evil of prostitution might be ameliorated if respectable women were less protective of their virtue, and was reportedly pleased in her later years when it appeared that prostitution had declined as a consequence of the "competition of amateurs."

In 1889, at just under thirty years of age, Constance Black married Edward Garnett, some seven years her junior, and thus entered a remarkable literary family. Her father-in-law, Richard Garnett, for many years superintendent of the British Museum reading room, was an eminent translator and author (*The Twilight of the Gods*); her husband Edward Garnett was a critic, essayist, and writer; her only son, David, became a reputable author and even wrote at least one essay introducing a volume of his mother's translations. Thus, by her own accomplishments and through the distinction of her family by marriage, Constance Garnett came to occupy a prominent place at the center of English intellectual life.

Although the Black family had distant links with Russia, so far as we know Constance Garnett remained oblivious of that country until most probably the latter part of 1891, when she was pregnant with David and had to be quite careful with her always fragile health. At that time her husband introduced her to Felix Volkhovsky, a member of the London Russian colony, who not only assisted her in studying the Russian language during the idleness of pregnancy but also brought her to other local Russian exiles, and especially to Sergey Stepniak, for whom she soon formed a more than merely literary affection.

Sergey Stepniak (1852–95, pseudonym of Sergey Kravchinsky) was a bona fide revolutionary terrorist who in 1878 assassinated the head of the St. Petersburg gendarmerie on the street in broad daylight and with little difficulty eventually escaped to London. In emigration he transformed himself into a writer and publicist for the Russian revolutionary cause. In 1890–91 he undertook a lecture and fund-raising tour in the United States to support that cause. A genuine intellectual with sincere literary interests, Stepniak no doubt quickly realized that his friendship with Constance Garnett offered a fine opportunity to bring Russian literature to the attention of the English-speaking public. He evidently assisted her in her initial study of Russian—a difficult language that she learned at least to read with astounding rapidity—and guided her in her choice of works for translation. It was he who encouraged her to publish her first translation, Goncharov's *A Common Story*, which led to a commission to do Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. When shortly thereafter she embarked upon the monumental task of translating Ivan Turgenev's novels and stories, Stepniak apparently verified her translation and also provided the first two volumes (containing *Rudin* and *A Nest of Gentlefolk*) with incisive introductions of the sort she was incapable of writing herself. In 1899 she dedicated one of the Turgenev volumes "to the memory of Stepniak whose love of Turgenev suggested this translation." He had been killed in 1895, evidently so absorbed in his own thoughts one day that he failed to hear a train approaching a London crossing as he moved across the tracks.

Constance Garnett had the good fortune to live at a time when she could still meet some of the creators of nineteenth-century Russian literature personally. No doubt she was driven by the desire to do so, and by the wish to see the country she had come to know so well through its literature; in any case, the first day of 1894 found her on her way alone to Russia, a trip that occupied three months. Her purposes were not solely literary: she carried with her money collected by the London exiles for belated relief after the famine of 1892. But she also visited Yasnaya Polyana to meet Leo Tolstoy and became acquainted with Vladimir Korolenko, a well-known writer at the time. But apparently she made no attempt to see Chekhov, and when she took her second and final trip to Russia—in 1904, with her son David this time—Chekhov was at least near death. On her second visit she spent much of her time as a houseguest of the writer Alexander Ertel at his home in Tambov province. In any case, her travels provided Constance Garnett a firsthand acquaintance with the Russia of her day, as well as with some Russian writers, although not, except for Tolstoy, with any of the figures she would dedicate her life to translating.

It soon became clear that translating classical Russian literature would become the cen-

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ter of Constance Garnett's life. The birth of her first child was so difficult that she never had another, and caring for her son did not deflect her from her ambition. Her husband encouraged her in her work, and after Stepniak's death, Edward Garnett wrote forewords for several volumes of the Turgenev edition, which he later gathered in a separate volume. After some years Edward Garnett began living much of the time with another woman, Nellie Heath, with whom Constance was on good terms, and this arrangement left Constance considerable time to herself. During her last years, and especially after Edward's death in 1937, she was alone.

In most ways, then, Constance Garnett's life revolved about her translating. Two small vignettes furnish a glimpse of her at work. The first comes from *The Golden Echo*, a biographical memoir written in 1954 by her son David:

> Sometimes, but not always, I would work in the same room with her and, letting my pencil lie idle on the paper, I would watch the changing expressions on her face, eager, frowning, puzzled or amused. The Russian words were translated not only on the foolscap sheet of paper in front of her, but into English features and flesh and blood. Her face was so expressive that I could guess at the emotional tension of what she was reading.

The second vignette occurs in Constance Garnett's brief reminiscences recorded shortly before her death in 1946. When she undertook her translation of Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*, she recalled, she gave the manuscript of several sketches to Stepniak for his inspection. When after a time Stepniak reported that he had lost the texts, she retranslated them; thereafter the first versions turned up among his papers. When Constance compared the two versions, she remembered,

> To my surprise I found they were identical. I had hesitated in the same places over the same words, and had written the same possible alternatives above the line in the same places. I concluded that though someone else might do a better version, it was clear that I could not myself. I had done the only version I was capable of.

These passages reveal something of the secret of Constance Garnett's success as a translator: she entered into the text she was translating with total absorption, and she quickly arrived at a version upon which she could not herself improve—or so she was persuaded at an early stage—and that fact contributed to the rapidity with which she worked.

Constance Garnett was not Turgenev's first English translator, nor he the writer she first translated. Looking back at the end of her career, she was a trifle astonished at her own temerity in attempting Turgenev so early. Tolstoy, she wrote, had a "simple style [that] goes straight into English without any trouble," whereas "Turgenev is much the most difficult of the Russians to translate because his style is the most beautiful." Nonetheless, it was her rendering of the bulk of Turgenev's writings that initially brought her renown. Thanks to his European friends, Turgenev had been translated relatively well and relatively early. His first important work to appear in English was *Fathers and Sons* (1862), translated by Eugene Schuyler for publication by Henry Holt in New York in 1867. This was followed by other volumes, constituting a series of sorts, for the most part by various hands, which continued to appear until 1885, two years after Turgenev's death. But this could be termed a collected edition of his works only in a very tenuous sense; it was not until Constance Garnett began issuing *The Novels of Ivan Turgenev* with Heinemann in 1894 that Turgenev found a faithful English interpreter. By 1899 the Garnett edition reached fifteen volumes, with two further volumes added in 1921 (despite the series title, it was by no means limited to novels, but included most of the short stories as well). Stepniak, as I have noted, wrote introductions to the first two volumes, and Edward Garnett wrote forewords to eight more. Some volumes appeared without introductions. Thus Constance Garnett's exertions made the bulk of Turgenev's writings easily available to the English reader for the first time.

Most of the critical commentary on Garnett's Turgenev was quite positive. It is true that at the beginning Stepniak was ever so slightly reserved, perhaps because he was so close to the entire enterprise. At the conclusion of the graceful essay dated April 20, 1894, which he provided for *Rudin*, he remarked that much of the "charm" of Turgenev's prose is "unavoidably lost in translation," but then added that the Garnett translation "is as near an approach to the elegance and poetry of the original as I have ever come across." Arnold

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Bennett, who did not pretend to know Russian and therefore judged the Garnett translations simply as English prose, without any reference to the originals, "vehemently congratulated" Constance Garnett on her achievement, declaring that her rendering "decidedly . . . has the air of being faithful; it is good English, and quite apart and aloof from the ruck of translations." Bennett was also persuaded that in her "scholarship" and "enormous pains" Garnett was far superior to any previous translators of Turgenev's writings.

Bennett always remained devoted to the woman whom, some twenty years later, he would call the "eternal Constance Garnett," in recognition of her steadfast dedication to her work. Other Englishmen evidently agreed with his assessment of her achievement. Thus, as the new century opened, the journal *The Academy* bestowed its annual award for translation (one of six categories) upon her in recognition of her translation of Turgenev. Translation is always a thankless task, remarked the anonymous author of the citation (quite possibly Bennett), and the difficulty of the Russian language makes the translator's work even more problematical.

> That Mrs. Garnett has conspicuously succeeded in a long and arduous task is beyond doubt. Her translation is faithful and correct. It is full of ingenuities unsuspected by the casual reader; and it has a quiet and modest grace. . . . Mrs. Garnett has deserved exceedingly well of her countrymen.

One writer who knew Russian well enough to judge the worth of the Turgenev translations directly was Joseph Conrad. Being a Pole, he had severe reservations about many Russian authors, but Turgenev was among those he always esteemed. Touched that Constance had dedicated one of the Turgenev volumes to him, he wrote Edward Garnett in late 1899 that he viewed Constance Garnett as Turgenev's interpreter rather than his translator, explaining: "She is in that work [her translation] what a great musician is to a great composer—with something more, something greater. It is as if the Interpreter had looked into the very mind of the Master and had a share in his inspiration." Seventeen years later Conrad still adhered to that opinion on the quality of Constance Garnett's renderings of Turgenev. "Turgenev for me is Constance Garnett and Constance Garnett *is* Turgenev," he wrote to Edward Garnett in 1917. "She has done that marvellous thing of placing the man's work inside English literature, and it is there that I see it—or rather that I *feel* it."

After Constance Garnett finished translating Turgenev, Isabel Hapgood entered the lists with a sixteen-volume edition of *The Novels and Stories of Ivan Turgenieff* (1903–4). That event supplied the occasion for a direct comparison between the two, published in the February 4, 1904, issue of the *Nation*, written by an anonymous reviewer who checked the originals against the two English versions. The reviewer found no "marked literary excellence" in either's work, and remarked that both translators fell into certain errors because they were unfamiliar with everyday Russian life. He felt that Hapgood enjoyed a "slight advantage" over Mrs. Garnett in matters of accuracy, but that Hapgood tended to "translate too literally," whereas "Mrs. Garnett seems to rise more often . . . to the possibilities of her subject, reproducing in English something of the simple eloquence of the original." A perusal of this nicely done review at a substantial remove in time leads one to surmise that the reviewer hoped to hand the laurels to Hapgood, but was constrained by his material to allocate praise and blame more evenly, and finally even to accord Constance Garnett a definite edge as a stylist. And style is, after all, a supremely important element in Turgenev.

Constance Garnett next turned, for a time, to Tolstoy. Her rendering of *Anna Karenina* appeared in 1901; thereafter she did *War and Peace* for publication in 1904, apparently straining her eyes rather badly in the process. She ended by issuing a total of four volumes of Tolstoy's writings. Although in the latter part of her life she expressed hope that she would be judged by her rendering of *War and Peace*, her contributions were not especially crucial to the creation of Tolstoy's English reputation, for he had no dearth of willing translators. Louise and Aylmer Maude, for example, also translated *War and Peace*, and later went on to do the monumental twenty-one-volume *Centenary Edition of Tolstoy*, published by the Oxford University Press between 1928 and 1937. In the United States Tolstoy's writings were translated by Isabel Hapgood, Nathan Haskell Dole, and especially Leo Wiener, who brought out his collected works in twenty-nine volumes from 1904 to 1912. Constance

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Garnett's withdrawal from this specific field of endeavor had, obviously, no special effect on Tolstoy's reputation in the English-speaking world.

The Garnett versions of Tolstoy did have their admirers. In 1902 John Galsworthy proclaimed her translation of *Anna Karenina* a "wonderful piece of work," "a true triumph of conversion." Joseph Conrad, who disliked Tolstoy, wrote to Edward Garnett in 1902 to congratulate his wife on her "splendid" text of *Anna Karenina*. He went on to say: "Of the thing itself [*Anna Karenina*] I think but little, so that her merit shines with the greater lustre," an assessment which made that other notable Slavic literary convert to English, Vladimir Nabokov (who cared for Conrad as little as Conrad for Tolstoy), snort: "This makes one dream—'ca fait rever' as Flaubert used to say when faced with some abysmal stupidity." Here Nabokov no doubt was assailing Conrad's denigration of *Anna Karenina* at least as much as his positive evaluation of Constance Garnett's work.

Thereafter Constance Garnett moved on to Dostoyevsky, a move that proved quite fruitful. From the vantage point of the 1980s, it is difficult to recall that Dostoyevsky for many years remained virtually unknown to the English-speaking world. German translations of his books began to appear as early as 1850, and by 1890 his entire oeuvre had been converted into French and German. Those few English intellectuals acquainted with him usually read him in French translations. The first English version of a major work by Dostoyevsky (which now is usually rendered as *Notes from the House of the Dead*) did not appear until 1881, the year of Dostoyevsky's death; *Crime and Punishment* and *The Insulted and Injured* appeared in English some five years later. But Dostoyevsky remained much too Russian for the English mind even then. The alert Arnold Bennett first obtained a French version of *The Brothers Karamazov* only in 1909. He recognized it as a stupendous work, an opinion that Mrs. Garnett bolstered by declaring the book Dostoyevsky's "masterpiece." At the time she was very possibly already engaged in translating it, realizing that she should begin with Dostoyevsky's last and finest creation.

The publication of Constance Garnett's version of *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1912 was a genuine literary event. John Middleton Murry compared the Garnett translation to the "most epoch-making translations of the past," placing it on a level with Sir Thomas North's *Plutarch*. The translation must certainly have contributed to Murry's interest in Dostoyevsky, which led him to produce one of the earliest (1916) English monographs on Dostoyevsky. More than that, *The Brothers Karamazov* initiated what Gilbert Phelps in his study of the influence of the Russian novel on English literature (*The Russian Novel in English Fiction*) calls the "Dostoyevsky cult and the Russian fever," an intellectual state that lasted roughly from 1912 to 1921. In fact, in the course of World War I, Phelps writes, "enthusiasm for Dostoyevsky [turned] into hysteria." Constance Garnett skillfully sustained that enthusiasm by producing a total of twelve volumes of his writings, brought out by Heinemann's between 1912 and 1920. As a consequence, Constance Garnett's name is now inextricably linked with Dostoyevsky's in the English-speaking world, although Conrad, who liked Dostoyevsky even less than he liked Tolstoy, wrote to Edward Garnett in 1912 that Dostoyevsky's "art does not deserve this good fortune"; only Turgenev, he said, and possibly Tolstoy, were worthy of her talent. Constance Garnett herself considered Dostoyevsky an "obscure" and "careless" writer whose texts a translator was simply compelled to "clarify." That assessment clashes with the opinions that two later commentators formulated in the course of remarks designed to defend Constance Garnett's reputation as a translator. Thus Helen Muchnic characterized Dostoyevsky's style as an "eminently 'plain' " one, while Edward Crankshaw wrote of the "overpowering vehemence" of his style that forthrightly "takes the thing out of the translator's hands and sweeps the reader along in an indiscriminate, headlong rush."

After igniting Western interest in Dostoyevsky, which has never truly subsided since, Constance Garnett took up Anton Chekhov, translating his stories in thirteen volumes (1916–22), followed by his plays in two volumes (1923). Like her Dostoyevsky, her translation of Chekhov came almost as a revelation to English readers, and "really established his reputation," according to Gilbert Phelps. Edward Crankshaw maintains that Chekhov's art "revolutionized the English short story" and that Chekhov in English was Constance Garnett's Chekhov. Hers were among the first

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English translations of Chekhov's writings, and her style was well adapted to his.

After launching Chekhov upon his English career, Garnett devoted what remained of the 1920s to Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Gogol. Her translation of Herzen's classic memoir *My Past and Thoughts* appeared in six volumes in London between 1924 and 1927; and her renderings of Gogol, that most exuberant of Russian stylists, came out in a six-volume collected edition from 1922 to 1927. Thereafter until her death Constance Garnett ceased translating, no doubt in part because of her failing eyesight. After all, by that time she had been indefatigably translating Russian writers for thirty-five years and could be forgiven if she were a bit weary, for she had done yeoman service in the cause of both Russian and English literature.

Constance Garnett's translations have attracted their share of detractors. Edmund Wilson, who thought he had learned Russian well enough to challenge Vladimir Nabokov on the problems of translating Pushkin, faulted her for causing Russian authors to "sound all more or less the same," an accusation recently repeated in the book *Less Than One* by Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, who maintains that the average Western reader cannot distinguish Tolstoy's voice from Dostoyevsky's: both strike him as simply "one great Russian writer, and the fact that they both were translated by the same hand, Constance Garnett, is of no help." (Recall here, however, that Constance Garnett did not translate Tolstoy very extensively.) Vladimir Nabokov, a man of strong opinions, thought Garnett's versions of Gogol "dry," "flat," "always unbearably demure," and regarded the woman herself as "totally lacking verbal talent," although he admitted that she worked "with a certain degree of care" that made her superior to other translators. Edmund Wilson, however, would not concede her even that much. "I've been translating passages from Turgenev and then looking them up in Constance Garnett and Isabel Hapgood," he wrote to Helen Muchnic in 1956. "Both are full of errors that even I can detect—which shows that they must have worked very fast, never checked on their work, and never read their translations to Russians."

On the other hand, Constance Garnett has never lacked for defenders. People have grasped the injustice of measuring a translator's work against some abstract standard of excellence, or against a standard set in short passages to which the evaluator can dedicate inordinate amounts of time. When Constance Garnett is measured by a much fairer standard of comparison—the existing translations of the same work—she fares quite well. Spurred by Avrahm Yarmolinsky's claim that Constance Garnett's translations of Dostoyevsky were slightly inaccurate, Helen Muchnic, to whom Edmund Wilson wrote so slightingly of Constance Garnett in 1956, compared in her book *Dostoyevsky's English Reputation* (1939) Garnett's rendering of a passage from *Notes from the House of the Dead* to one French and three English versions of the same passage. After careful consideration of the text in question, Muchnic found that Garnett "is never grossly inaccurate, or purely fanciful"—something that could not be said of her competitors—and concluded that "Constance Garnett's translation was the first in English to render the real flavor of Dostoyevsky with any degree of accuracy."

Another index of the quality of the Garnett translations is that they continue to be reprinted even now, when so many modern translators have the opportunity to learn from her experience and avoid her mistakes, only to discover that it is no easy task at the same time to surpass her positive accomplishments. Thus when Leonard J. Kent and Nina Berberova prepared a one-volume edition of Gogol's works (published in 1964), they based the edition on the Garnett translations with corrections and emendations, because, as Kent put it, "her work remains a remarkably competent and wonderfully conscientious achievement," unlike that of certain more recent translators who "confuse sheer verve with scholarship." Simon Karlinsky, a scholar of high standards, writes that Garnett displays "sympathy and respect" for Gogol's "stylistic peculiarities" and considers Garnett's renderings of Gogol vastly preferable to those of David Magarshack, even though Magarshack had a better command of Russian than did Garnett. Carolyn Heilbrun reports that in 1959 a Soviet specialist in translation found Constance Garnett's translation of *Dead Souls* the best of seven English versions of that novel that she had examined. And when the Slavic scholar Ralph Matlaw was preparing Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* for the Norton Critical Editions series, he, too, ended by revising and

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correcting the Garnett translation, which, he said, has a "quaint but dated charm" rather like that of the original work. Garnett's translations of Dostoyevsky continue to be reprinted today with few complaints from editors and scholars.

Constance Garnett moved at the center of the English literary life of her time. Into that literary sphere, partly through personal contact, she introduced the works of the nineteenth-century Russian realists as linguistically filtered through her mind. Her connections with John Galsworthy will illustrate the point. Galsworthy first met the Garnetts in 1900 when Conrad brought him to their home for lunch. At that point he was already much taken with Turgenev, whom he had read in Constance Garnett's translation, and was designing his *Villa Rubein* to fit the Turgenevan model. In 1904 he dedicated the first edition of *The Island Pharisees* to her in gratitude for her work with Turgenev. In 1910 she sent him a French translation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, evidently in the hope of interesting him in advance in the next Russian writer she would present to the British public. This is a good example of the way in which Constance Garnett, through her personal relationships with such writers as Galsworthy, Bennett, Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, and Ford Madox Ford, could stimulate a genuine appreciation of classical Russian literature, an appreciation that then spread through the English literary world.

Even more often, Constance Garnett influenced the course of English literature through her publications, which affected others in ways she could not know. She occasionally learned of the results of that influence: for example, through a letter she received in 1921 from a woman, unknown to her, who, after reading her translation of *War and Peace* published many years before, wrote spontaneously to thank her "for the whole other world that you have revealed to us through those marvelous translations from the Russian." The letter was signed Katherine Mansfield. Most important, perhaps, as Gilbert Phelps makes clear, is the fact that in several instances widespread English enthusiasm for particular Russian writers had to wait upon Constance Garnett's work schedule.

In an article on Constance Garnett written at the time of her death, Edward Crankshaw quotes a passage in Turgenev's "The Tryst" from *A Sportsman's Sketches*.

> I sat looking about and listening. The leaves faintly rustled over my head; from the sound of them alone one could tell what time of year it was. It was not the gay laughing tremor of the spring, nor the subdued whispering, the prolonged gossip of the summer, nor the chill and timid faltering of late autumn, but a scarcely audible, drowsy chatter. A slight breeze was faintly humming in the treetops. Wet with the rain the copse in its inmost recesses was for ever changing as the sun shone or hid behind a cloud; at one moment it was all radiance, as though suddenly everything were smiling in it; the slender stems of the thinly-growing birch trees took all at once the soft lustre of white silk, the tiny leaves lying on the earth were on a sudden flecked and flaring with purplish gold, and the graceful stalks of the high, curly bracken, decked already in their autumn color, the hue of an over-ripe grape, seemed interlacing in endlessly tangling criss-cross before one's eyes.

Crankshaw does not hesitate to pronounce this passage to be the work of a genius at translation, and one readily agrees with him, especially when one notes that it is a quite accurate rendering of a very intricate text that Mrs. Garnett had assayed only a few years after beginning her study of Russian. The passage demonstrates that Constance Garnett was quite simply a master of English prose in her own right.

Constance Garnett was a pioneer in the English translation of Russian literature and the introduction of that most magnificent of all nineteenth-century literatures to the most settled of European cultures. If one may adapt Joseph Conrad's words, she did that marvelous thing of placing Russian literature inside English literature, and it is there that one feels it. Like most pioneers, she moved over a vast terrain and could not dwell too long upon details, however important, in the same way well-trained specialists who followed her could. She worked rapidly, and that of necessity, for she had so little time to translate an immense quantity of writing in a language with which few could help her. She had next to no predecessors from whose mistakes and successes she could benefit. She had to work independently, even alone; she was human, and so made mistakes from time to time—egregious ones on occasion. But the scope of her work was an accomplishment in itself: quantity might also be transformed into quality when one takes account of the influence of one culture upon another, except that that quality was already inherent in her work.

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Many intellectual pioneers, as their work is superseded in detail, are relegated to the sphere of mere historical significance in far less than a century. Constance Garnett's remarkable literary gifts have enabled her to escape that fate nearly a century after she embarked upon her life's work; and one may surmise that her translations will continue to be read, along with more modern versions of the nineteenth-century Russian classics, into the indefinite future. And that is no mean achievement.

Sen-Sen

RICHARD FROST

Those tiny black chips that corrected my breath,
where are they? In a small factory
in western Pennsylvania are two men
still baking the formula, tweezing each flake
into those envelopes? I can't find it
anywhere—not on the stock exchange,
not way in the back of my old bureau drawer
or in the lining of my tux. Where is Sen-Sen?
Two of those little squares and I'd be dancing
with girls in the gym, my feather carnation
wired to my lapel, the dance band swinging
those Miller stocks. I'd smell hair and gardenias
and bare shoulders, crepe streamers whirling me
under the lights. Chaperones beaming. I'd be a
nice boy again if I only had some Sen-Sen.

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Letters of Rejection

A Personal Experience

EDWARD LE COMTE

In the *Autobiography* of Mark Van Doren, I read with surprise that Van Doren had had enormous difficulty placing his psychological thriller *Windless Cabins*. We lesser authors expect such frustration, but that Mark Van Doren, Pulitzer Prize–winning poet, distinguished critic, great teacher—mine at Columbia—author of fifty books, chancellor of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, should have to wait for five years and try twenty-five publishers before one of his best books saw the light of day was hard to believe. That *Windless Cabins* bears the imprint of his usual publisher, Holt, also calls for an explanation. Surely Holt was the first publisher that was tried; then, twenty-four publishers later, Holt underwent a conversion? And rightly so from even a business point of view: my copy registers three printings, all in February 1940.

A parallel story has been widely told recently, even on television: the struggle and ultimate triumph of the novelist William Kennedy. Years after I became Van Doren's colleague at Columbia, I went on to become Kennedy's at the State University of New York at Albany. His office was just across the aisle from mine. He wrote in my copy of *Ironweed*: "With good memories of life on the 3rd floor during the 1970s, a bleak decade with nice horizon." What was bleak in the seventies was that Kennedy was a lowly middle-aged instructor in journalism, without tenure or hope of tenure, who couldn't get his best novel published. He tried thirteen publishers and was considering resorting to the small presses. Then, as all the literary world knows, Saul Bellow read the manuscript and insisted that Viking, Kennedy's regular publisher and Bellow's at that time, retract its rejection. Result: Pulitzer Prize, National Book Critics Circle Award, MacArthur Foundation genius award, full professorship at SUNY-Albany, filming of *Ironweed*—script by Kennedy—with Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep.

Nor do past best-sellers guarantee acceptance of the next book. I met James T. Farrell at a time when his latest novel was being repeatedly rejected. Barbara Pym wrote, "In the early 1960s I sent my seventh novel to my publishers. And to my horror they wrote back saying they didn't feel they wanted it. I offered it to several others but the manuscript still came thudding back through the letterbox. . . . It was an awful humiliating sensation to be totally rejected after all those years." The *New York Times* of February 10, 1986, had this headline: "After Years of Rejection, McDonald Novel Is a Hit." The years were almost twelve! Gregory McDonald had dared something different from his popular Fletch and Flynn detective stories. That could not be tolerated, and it wasn't—until Penzler Books took on his novel *Safekeeping* for a ten-dollar advance.

Everyone, of course, relishes seeing publishers proven mistaken, and for some of us it is a sweet, if vicarious, revenge. Tell us again how many times *The Catcher in the Rye* was turned down.

I approached fifty-five publishers with my latest novel. The world record, according to

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the 1987 *Guinness Book of World Records*, is 223—and still counting—for a 130,000-word manuscript entitled "World Government Crusade." A friend of a friend has written that he sent his nonfiction manuscript to "over 200" publishers. There are those who would be surprised to learn that there *are* that many. His not giving up paid off: Louis Auster's *Hitler's Death March* was taken by Zebra Books and is in its third printing. (Did the author proceed *alphabetically*, beginning with Addison-Wesley?)

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Kenneth Roberts, the historical novelist, who said he had never had anything, long or short, rejected in his entire career. When I mentioned this to the historian and biographer Stefan Lorant and remarked that Roberts deserved a place in the *Guinness Book*, the quick rejoinder was, "Indeed yes—as the world's biggest liar!"

I started writing my novel in 1980. When I had done eighty pages—which I guessed would be half its length (I knew it would be short, but, at the time, didn't know *how* short)—I showed it, with a one-page synopsis of the rest, to Ann Elmo, who had been my agent for two previous books. I was aware that editors often prefer to have just a sample—one chapter, say, and an outline: it saves them reading time. Ann wrote back: "I think you have some of your best writing here. Unfortunately, it's far out, too far out, I think, to meet present requirements." Next I tried an agent who had once handled some short stories of mine. On the phone he said my subject matter was "impossible." Finally, at a party, I met another veteran agent, who agreed to represent me.

He got nowhere. A poet said, "Why should you expect a contract for an unfinished work?" I decided to finish. I was unable, however, to produce 160 pages, itself well below the norm. My last page was numbered 121. I was offering freakish brevity, barely 32,000 words—a length acceptable abroad, but not here.

I did not know the editors' reactions. Unlike Ann Elmo, my latest agent did not send me letters of rejection, which, however adverse, I am always curious about. I had to do repeated questioning by phone to discover where my manuscript had gone. To this day, I know of only three publishers he sent my novel to—Doubleday; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; and St. Martin's Press, where Joyce Engelson, who had been my editor at the Dial Press for my biography *The Notorious Lady Essex*, was housed. This was the one letter I was shown. Joyce wrote: "I had several good readings on the Le Comte here, but the same people also voiced reservations. The writing is good, of course, and it's a tempting idea for a book but, I think, a much more difficult project to pull off successfully than I had imagined initially."

I couldn't agree more.

In the fall of 1983, I told the agent that I would try to get the novel published on my own. At least I would see my own letters of rejection. He retained my first copy, and I would have been happy to pay him his commission if he earned it, but my guess was that he had given up but didn't have the heart to tell me.

My query, sent out to scores of editors over the next four years, read as follows:

> This is to inquire if you would be interested in an unusual novel, *I, Eve*, 121 pages. It is a modern version, from a proto-feminist and not very religious point of view, of the Adam and Eve (and Lilith) and Cain and Abel and Seth story. The great advantage is the subject matter (and, I hope, the style—I have some reputation as a stylist) and the curiosity aroused as to what a modern handling can be like.
>
> Among the sixteen books listed for me in *Who's Who in America* are three novels. My first, *He and She* (1960)—which went into Avon paperback—was a finalist in the National Book Awards. I'd settle (and so perhaps would you) for a fraction of the nearly half a million sales of my New American Library edition of *Paradise Lost*.
>
> The book could be made longer by adding five short stories, bringing the manuscript up to 186 pages with a title of *I, Eve and Others*. But in any case *I, Eve* should be judged first and separately.

The letter had two purposes. One was to put publishers on notice about length and subject matter, enabling them to decline in advance, by silence or by note, thus saving us all time and trouble and postage. The second purpose was, if I did receive an invitation, to get me past the office boy. Call me arrogant, but I hoped and expected to be spared form letters about "unfortunately not for our list" or "does not meet our present editorial requirements." Yes, I do understand the economy of such letters. I understand, too, that editors do not want, by venturing a comment, to get in-

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volved in prolonged, heated arguments with indignant rejectees. The latter could cool it with this card that is printed in John White's frothy book *Rejection*: "Dear Editor: The volume of rejection slips that I receive makes it impossible for me to answer each one individually."

Almost the only form letter I received—and you had to study it to make out the difference in type—was from Fred Jordan of Grove Press. "Thank you so much for sending us your manuscript. We have read it with a great deal of interest. I'm afraid we have finally had to conclude that it isn't right for us, and I'm returning it enclosed. I'm very grateful to you for letting us read it." That is truly—or falsely—designed to soothe the egos of all us hapless aspirants, no matter what our unnamed "manuscript" is. Other publishers may want to copy it.

I did receive one bit of nonsense from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: "We regret that, due to prior publishing commitments, we are unable to accept *I, Eve* for publication." "Prior publishing commitments"? Are they committed to the end of time? I took this up with the big boss himself, William Jovanovich, in Orlando, Florida. Having asked for plain English, I got it. "The response was ambiguous, you're right. Thank you for pointing it out. The fact is that we don't think your book can be successfully published."

I was puzzled, also, by Peter Glassgold's note from New Directions. "Thank you for letting us see your novel. It is a well-written and entertaining book of its kind, but I do not think it really falls within New Directions' modernist purview. And so, much as I enjoyed your work personally, I am returning the manuscript to you now." I knew they published fiction by my friend William Herrick, which I would never classify as "modernist." Next time I saw him I asked, "Are you modernist?" "God no!" he replied.

Actually, I prefer honest distaste to praise that makes me feel I was nearly accepted. A miss is more heartbreaking to make by a fraction than by a mile. Among the straight-out dislikers of my novel was Shannon G. Bowman of Little, Brown, who wrote: "While I found it an interesting exercise and can surely understand the impulse of a Milton scholar to 'modernize' the Adam and Eve story, the piece, at last, did not work for me. The psycho-sexual language and sensibility of the 70's and 80's seems to me more limiting and less illuminating than Milton's controlled verse. There is something oddly frustrating about re-experiencing the story in this manner, but that is a matter of opinion." An editor at Linden Press was a good deal less explicit: "I've gone through it, and while I found it more than proficient in every way, it was not a book after my own taste. Subjective criticism at its very best, I'll grant you, but you are better off with an editor who loves your book." Is "best" a slip for "worst"?

If Shannon Bowman felt I shouldn't compete with Milton, Jonathan Galassi, then at Random House, felt I ought not to take on Moses. "This I thought quite an entertaining version of the original story, with a few notable modern interpretations and expressions added on. But I'm afraid that I felt that this isn't as complete a telling as it could be, either in length or in themes; and that those quibbles aside, it may be nothing short of a radical revision of [an] entire episode that would be necessary to make anyone sit up and take notice of such an exercise. The biblical telling of it is, some might think, unbeatable."

Among the useless compliments was this ungrammatical one from an editor who has since left Walker, one of my former publishers. "Both me and another reader were struck by your fresh approach to the difficulties involved in giving the contemporary reader a credible look at the life of Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, the book falls somewhat outside the fields in which we normally publish."

Two letters were particularly tantalizing. Nessa Rapoport wrote: "The language is so rich I didn't notice the brevity. As I suspected, the work is not for Bantam. I do not feel that at this early point in our hardcover career we could publish this book appropriately—nor keep it in print any length of time. I admire your ambition and mastery; and wish you well with *I, Eve* elsewhere."

Deanne Smeltzer of David R. Godine in Boston was a real teaser: "I have read *I, Eve*, and admire it in many ways. Your prose is utterly on key, as is the humor when it appears. It is unusual and reassuring to read a manuscript in which the intent is obviously borne out skillfully. I'm sorry to say, though, that I can't make the leap in faith needed. Godine has an extremely small fiction list, as you probably know, and I don't feel *I, Eve* is a likely enough candidate. You've put yourself

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and your writer's voice in Eve's shoes [she doesn't wear any!] and have done an almost perfect job of that, but the imaginative life of the novel, for me, stops there." If only most of that comment were in a review! But what was Smeltzer's objection? If I carried out my intent, what more did she want? Did not Alexander Pope admonish, "In every work regard the writer's end, / Since none can compass more than they intend." I asked Christopher Bamford, who is himself a small publisher, "What does she mean by 'the imaginative life' complaint?" "It's her way of saying she doesn't like it," he answered.

Speaking of small publishers, in my growing desperation I reached ever further out—Van Vactor & Goodheart in Cambridge, Massachusetts ("While I found the work highly amusing at times, the point of view is extremely limited and soon becomes tiresome"); Lawrence Hill in Westport, Connecticut ("I found it to be interesting, and erotic in parts"); Woodbine House, Kensington, Maryland, where Terry Rosenberg is "Acquisitions Editor" ("enjoyed it very much. I was impressed with your creativity and writing style and hope that you are able to get it published"); McPherson, New Paltz, New York ("engaging and frequently humorous. Regrettably, . . ."), Crossing Press in Trumansburg, New York, which typed out a big-publisher cliché: "Thanks for letting us see your novel. I am sorry it is not right for our list." Well, Crossing Press, I thought at the time, let me tell you here and now that until I stumbled upon your name in some obscure source, I had never heard of you. I had never even heard of Trumansburg, New York. Is it named after President Truman? Or Truman Capote?

I was experiencing in some instances delays of from three to six months, so I took to having as many as four copies out at once. They all came back, sooner or later. The post office never lost anything. Only one firm asked for return postage, Ontario Review Press in Princeton ("It's an interesting treatment of the Adam/Eve story, but not quite right for OR press").

The six-month record was set by another editor at St. Martin's, who is the editor of a friend. The editor is said to be discerning but is notorious for dallying, or just plain inertia. Forewarned, after four months I phoned. "He is not picking up his phone," I was told. Too busy neglecting manuscripts? I wondered. I asked for his assistant, whose name I knew. "He is not picking up his phone." When I read in *Publishers Weekly* that Carole Baron had moved to St. Martin's, I asked her for help. At last came a note from the assistant that the lazy fellow (*my* words, not his) "asked me to apologize in his behalf for the interval between submission and response of *I, Eve.* He had, in fact, read the ms. prior to your letter to Ms. Baron, and, while respecting its literary merit, was hard pressed to see how it might be marketed effectively. With your letter to her, he gave the manuscript to her with his enthusiasm for its content, hoping that she might see a way to publish it effectively. As you may know, she has since left St. Martin's for Bantam Books, leaving the ms. with us, though not making it clear whether she had or had not read it. You may wish to approach her directly. In any event, best of luck with it."

It is well that I was not holding my breath with just the one copy. At the rate of two submissions a year, it would have taken Louis Auster more than a hundred years to accomplish all his submissions. I did not hold my breath for Bill Zavatsky of SUN Publishing either, described in a *New York Times* article on small presses as specializing in "authors who have been passed over by larger publishers." I sent him my standard query on October 21, 1985. On July 13, 1987, he mailed my letter back with the annotation: "Sorry for this ridiculously late response. We are 'booked up' for two years to come."

In these four years of frustration, if anybody had asked me (nobody did) what publisher I would prefer, I would first have said, "*Any* publisher," then added, "If it's a serious question—Knopf or Scribner's or Atheneum." Knopf pioneered in beautiful books in the twenties and thirties, has the glorious past of such authors as Thomas Mann and Willa Cather, not to mention present luminaries. I am old enough to have been rejected, with believable expression of regret, by Blanche Knopf herself. When I was fifteen my parents bought the first book of which I noted the publisher, because it was like a box of candy in its instant appeal: *The Fountain* by Charles Morgan, Knopf, 1932. It also turned out to be exquisitely written. I still remember a sentence: "I was like a deaf man in a wood of singing birds, waiting for a miracle."

Scribner's, resonant of Hemingway and

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Fitzgerald and the much rejected Thomas Wolfe, has the siren song of a bookstore on Fifth Avenue where I'd like my books to be sold. On my first visit I splurged on Holbrook Jackson's *Anatomy of Bibliomania*, 854 erudite pages bound in rust buckram. At a later time, around 1952, I brought in my manuscript of a collection of last words of famous persons and received my speediest turndown ever from Scribner's John Hall Wheelock, tall and stooped, who, when I told him what I had, went into the inner sanctum and conferred with other gentlemen—remember when publishing used to be called a gentleman's profession?—whose shadows I could make out through the glazed glass.

Atheneum I know as a quality publisher with an impressive list of—among others—poets. I once did work for one of the founders, the late Hiram Haydn, who was also editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. A senior editor at Knopf, Charles Elliott, I was acquainted with because he lived in the same village as I do, Alford, Massachusetts. But he departed for residence in England.

Jacques Barzun, now a literary adviser at Scribner's, gave me the name of Susanne Kirk, executive editor there. Her letter read: "Several of my colleagues and I have read your novel with interest, and we all agree that this is an impressive piece of work. Eve has a unique and memorable voice, and you have the unusual ability to make profound ideas accessible to the general reader. I wish I could make a publishing offer, but the truth is that we are very restricted in the number of new novels we can acquire. The sales for so-called 'midlist' novels are depressing, and we have no choice but to be extremely cautious in adding to that part of the list."

Atheneum I tried three times. At one point, I addressed the president, but received no answer. Two years later I got the name, from *Publishers Weekly*, of the new editor in chief. She did not answer either, probably because, as I afterwards learned, she did not stay. (The musical chairs that editors play go with the profession.) Finally, in *Publishers Weekly* I came upon the picture of Harry Ford, the editor and designer who had recently won an award.

The first letter my manuscript elicited from him, on July 2, 1987, was a tease or cliffhanger: "Just an interim note to tell you that I have read *I, Eve,* and find it very impressive; elegantly written and most moving. True, it's short, a novella in fact, but I'd be reluctant to add other stories to it, as weakening the impact (no matter how good they are) of this quite strong piece of work. I have given it to another reader to comment on. I would like to publish it, but whether we can find room for it on a crowded list is another matter. I'll be back to you in a much shorter time than it's taken me to get to this letter."

Was this the light before daybreak, or would it be just another useless compliment for my pathetic pile? Would the other reader like it? Would room be found on the "crowded list"? About not adding stories, I agreed; I had been throwing a sop to the conventional wisdom regarding publishable length. The only publisher that asked to see the stories was Ticknor & Fields. As for the word "novella," I'm touchy about that: *I, Eve*, I contend, is longer than a novella.

Harry Ford's final news came on July 28, 1987: "This is to let you know that I will be leaving Atheneum at the end of August, to join Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., as per the attached from *Publishers Weekly*. I gave your book to Thomas Stewart, president and publisher of Atheneum to read, and he was as impressed with it as I. He in turn gave it to a young editor, Lawrence McIntyre, to read who turned out to be as enthusiastic as the two of us. You will be hearing from McIntyre offering a contract, and I'm happy that this has worked out for you. Unhappy for myself, however, since I wish I were publishing it myself! If for *any* reason you fail to come to terms with Atheneum, I'm sure I can offer you speedy acceptance at Knopf." After famine, feast. One odd coincidence is that Atheneum is owned by Scribner's.

It was all bundled up in phone calls with Lawrence McIntyre. They asked if I could add two pages on Seth. I could and I did. Otherwise the manuscript was acceptable as I wrote it. I escaped that all-too-common fate, vetting by editors who are themselves frustrated writers.

I was asked what my advances had been on my other novels. I couldn't remember except that they had been embarrassingly small. Shifting gears I recalled that my novel *He and She* had brought four thousand dollars from Avon in 1960/61 (two thousand dollars each for author and publisher), and sold thirty-seven thousand copies. I pointed out that four thou-

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sand dollars then would be not less than eight thousand dollars now. That figure stuck: the offer to me from Atheneum was an advance of four thousand dollars.

After we had been getting along so well, Lawrence McIntyre departed (of course!), the way editors do, and I had an anxious month wondering if a fourth person could be found who liked the manuscript. When the suspense became unbearable, I phoned, and the person who answered was my new editor, Margaret Talcott, who gave immediate assurances and later wrote (November 19): "I think you have done a tremendous job with Eve. Her voice is consistent, strong and entirely credible. I feel quite certain that I am her descendant (and you were quite correct in saying that we are suited to each other—I, a female editor and she, the author of all that is female!)."

I, Eve comes out in August 1988. I am seventy-one. I am under an obligation to live quite a few months past seventy-two to see how my "eternal-feminine" brainchild fares. Her delivery was long and hard.

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Aby Warburg in His Early Correspondence

A. M. MEYER

Aby M. Warburg (1866–1929), one of the most original historians of his generation, was the founder, in the early years of this century, of the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* in Hamburg, which became the Warburg Institute on its transfer to London in 1933 and was incorporated in the University of London in 1944. Material in the Institute's archives reaches back to Warburg's youth and offers a rich mine of information to the historian of German cultural life. In *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London 1970, and re-published by the University of Chicago Press in 1986), Professor E. H. Gombrich limited himself to quoting such passages from Warburg's correspondence as have a bearing on his early studies. The selection presented here concentrates on Warburg's family background and particularly on his relation to his Jewish home, matters not taken up in detail in Professor Gombrich's book. Reference may also be made to the cognate essay by the late Hans Liebeschütz, "Aby Warburg as Interpreter of Civilization" (*Year Book XVI of the Leo Baeck Institute*, London 1971). Dr. Liebeschütz, who knew Warburg well, was unable to avail himself of the letters.

Two recent contributions in a long line of attempted assessments of Warburg—Georg Syamken's "Warburgs Umwege als Hermeneutik More Majorum" (*Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* XXV, 1980) and George Steiner's "Graven Images" (*The New Yorker*, February 2, 1987)—have alluded to Talmudic influence in Warburg's development. In fact it is unlikely that in his youth Warburg was ever encouraged to read the Talmud, although he later had a Talmudic section in his library (which included the *Monumenta Talmudica* and the *Mishna on Idolatry*). What is certain is that he did not receive any religious instruction from his father, the successful banker Moritz M. Warburg, though the latter was a very orthodox Jew who wanted his seven children to be strictly observant. The children were all taught Hebrew by their mother. Their much-loved Christian governess, Franziska Jahns, who spent over thirty years in the Warburg household, learned Hebrew with them in order to be able to help them to say their daily prayers; she also tried to learn Latin, English, and French with the Warburg children. Franziska nursed the children through all of their illnesses; she was the only person capable of dealing with Aby's frequent tantrums. The boy exploited a medical instruction to his family that he was not to be excited after he had been very seriously ill with typhoid fever in his seventh year.

The Warburgs took their name from the small Westphalian town in which they had lived before they settled in Hamburg-Altona, about the middle of the seventeenth century, their records in Germany going back to the fourteenth century. The firm of M. M. Warburg & Co. was founded in 1798, not as a result of dealing in commodities, like other banks that came into existence about the same time, but as a pure banking enterprise. The Hanseatic republic of Hamburg was proud of its ancient traditions, its old-established families, its merchants who knew the world (an analogy with Florence, as Warburg was to find when he embarked on his archival research). Its professional and merchant classes were puritanical ("hard work, like charity, [was] an

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almost religious duty," as Fritz Saxl said in 1944 in his unfinished biography of Warburg), but they had patrician habits. These attitudes and habits came to be shared by the Warburgs. Very probably this process began even before Hamburg's Jews were granted full civic rights in 1849.

There was a strong matriarchal element in the Warburg family. Sara, the daughter of Moses Marcus Warburg, the senior partner of the firm in the first generation, was an exceptionally beautiful, intelligent, and well educated woman of great piety. It is said that Heine's poem "Ein Jüngling liebt' ein Mädchen . . . " was about her. On the death of the younger partner, Sara's bachelor uncle Gerson, her father Moses chose as a new partner the son of a cousin, Aby S., whom Sara married in 1829. Moses died in 1831; Aby S. died in 1856, and Sara took over the running of the firm as sole proprietor, giving her elder son Siegmund, then aged twenty-one, power of attorney until she made him a partner three years later. The younger son, Moritz M., was sent on a long journey to France and Italy in 1862, both to foster business contacts and to look at works of art, before he himself became a partner at the age of twenty-four. Sara had brought up her sons so strictly and imbued them with such a sense of duty that they were well equipped to shoulder their responsibilities in their early twenties.

Moritz Warburg married Charlotte Oppenheim. They had seven children, the eldest of whom was Aby M., the art historian, born in 1866. The seven children lived in awe of their grandmother Sara, who died in 1884. They were, however, on the most affectionate terms with the maternal Oppenheim grandparents in Frankfurt am Main: they stayed with them frequently; and Aby's brothers Max, Paul, and Felix during their banking apprenticeships lived in their grandparents' house for long periods. Grandmother Oppenheim, like Sara, took an active part in her husband's firm (diamonds, pearls, and antiques), had power of attorney, and was in full charge during his absence. According to family reminiscences, she had an austere streak that counterbalanced her husband's proverbial liberality, and her savings formed the basis of their considerable wealth. Both were fond of music, helped to endow the Frankfurt Opera, supported artists, and were prominent in charitable activities (as Sara Warburg had also been). Max M. Warburg tells us in his privately printed extracts from his memoirs (New York, 1952) that his grandfather Oppenheim, a trained goldsmith, was a deeply religious man and that he taught himself thirteen languages. Culturally, Frankfurt had much more to offer in that period than Hamburg, and when Charlotte Oppenheim married Moritz M. Warburg she was appalled to find that there was no art gallery in Hamburg, and she was at first bewildered by the city's "Englishness."

Charlotte, though less obviously a matriarch than Sara Warburg, was undoubtedly a remarkable woman. She was well educated, spoke very good French and English, sang, and wrote poetry. She had a sense of humor as well as a very marked sense of duty which she tried to pass on to her children. Moritz left their education entirely to Charlotte. For many years she supervised their homework every afternoon. With her compassionate understanding of their behavior and their needs, she was perhaps less intransigent than her husband in matters of Jewish ritual observance, but she never broke the rules herself. Life in the large house on the Mittelweg was affluent, and Charlotte ran it most efficiently. In a typescript version (fuller than the printed one) of extracts from his memoirs, Max reports that the Moritz Warburgs wanted to live like other respected, well-situated Hamburg burghers, whereas the Siegmund Warburgs on the Alsterufer were anxious to play a part in the Jewish aristocracy of Germany. In spite of this difference in outlook, the two families were very close. Charlotte did not want her children to become conceited. Ostentation was considered vulgar. Again it is Max who tells us that she always referred to their father as a "merchant," never as a "banker." In 1893 Moritz acquired as a summer residence a large estate on the Kösterberg, high above the Elbe, which is still in the family: sometimes all seven children, their spouses, and twenty-one grandchildren stayed there together.

It was assumed that the brothers and sons in each generation would follow the family tradition, train as bankers, and become partners in M. M. Warburg & Co. The story of how Aby, at the age of thirteen, sold his birthright to his brother Max, barely a year younger, in return for the promise that Max would always buy him all the books he wanted, has been told many times. In his memoirs Max adds: "This pact was surely the most thoughtless

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one of my life; I have, however, never regretted it. For it was the basis of Aby's library and institute and of his highly successful life's work. But in addition his activity has enriched the lives of our whole family and widened the horizon of each of us in a manner never previously anticipated."

How seriously Max took this pact from the time it was made is borne out by a letter that he wrote to Aby on July 8, 1890, when he was working for the Banque Impériale Ottomane in Paris:

> Your letter gives me much pleasure for two reasons. Firstly, I see from it that your work is progressing well and secondly, you have retained so much practical common sense that you realize that a machine can only function well when it is improved from time to time and always kept well oiled. That is clear, and it is not only your wish but also our father's, as well as Paul's and my own, that we should both work towards this as quickly as possible. However, *my* entry [into M. M. Warburg & Co.] is not as essential as you think. I was in London recently, and Paul and I have more or less established our plans. But I do not much like writing about such things, though I shall *always* have to, and indeed wish to, inform you verbally of *everything*, not only because you are the eldest but generally because you are our brother. Meanwhile I can only advise you in your own interest not to concern yourself with the firm more than I do with art; and that is unfortunately damned little. The moment you start to look more closely into the firm you will inevitably be assailed by *so many* worries that they are bound at least to detract from your ability to work. What use is that to you? The way you want to live you will always be able to live thanks to a very wealthy father; the balance sheet will never need to worry you. . . . In this whole question of my preparatory career both Papa and now you manifest a peculiarity which would seem to be at least strongly Semitic: to anticipate success without thorough training. In the last 13 years I have hardly been abroad—and already the two of you wish me to settle down as *Procurist* in Hamburg: that is *exactly* the same as if you were to abandon your studies now and to begin writing books; I believe, however, that you prefer to deliver *one* very important mature book. Mother has a much more Christian attitude. . . . I shall probably return here in November for another six months while Paul remains in Hamburg, what happens then are merely projects. . . .

More than once in later years Warburg's book purchases threatened to get out of hand, even in his own eyes. All bills, however, were duly paid. At a memorial meeting for his brother in 1929, Max quoted Aby's remark: "Successful bankers elsewhere keep a racing stable and are cheated by their jockeys and trainers. You keep a library and have the advantage of a gentleman rider: myself."

The family in Hamburg, and particularly the grandparents in Frankfurt, tried to dissuade Aby from becoming an art historian and to convince him that he could "at least earn money indirectly, as a doctor or research chemist"—but to no avail. In the autumn of 1886 he began his studies at the University of Bonn, where he stayed until 1889. His teachers were Carl Justi and Henry Thode for the history of art and Reinhard Kekulé von Stradonitz for archaeology; from Hermann Usener he learned classical mythology, and Karl Lamprecht introduced him to the philosophy of history.

In Bonn, Warburg shared lodgings with his Hamburg friend Paul Ruben, who was to become a respected Old Testament scholar, though ill-health prevented him from taking up any official position. Ruben probably taught Warburg more about Judaism and its history than anyone else. The two had their daily midday meal in a kosher household run as a restaurant, but soon Warburg grew tired of the cooking. When the grandparents heard of this, it was suggested that he should change to another university. He wrote to his father: "Since I do not arrange my course of study according to the quality of ritual restaurants but according to the quality of my teachers, I do not eat ritually." In a letter dated January 26, 1887, he wrote to his mother:

> When you write, dearest Mama, about the things that will go by the board through eating differently, I must tell you that you are doing me an injustice. I am not at all ashamed to be a Jew, on the contrary I am trying to show others that representatives of my kind are well suited, in accordance with their talents, to insert themselves as useful links in the chain of present-day cultural and political developments; but just because I want to do that I must strive to shake off whatever will not fit organically into my activity. I want to act as I am; I want to be regarded by people for what I am. In any case my striving is honest and the will is there. If I am wrong—well, I shall at least have acted in what seemed to me the right way; but I am too old and have in other respects been standing on my own feet for too long to be able, out of consideration for persons who are very dear to me, to go on doing

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something which is in the most glaring contrast to what I think. I hope to show you one day that I am capable of achieving something in my self-chosen place. I thank you both for your understanding of my position, more than I can say; only in this way can our relationship remain a sincere one; and that is my heart's desire.

From his letters sent home from Bonn, Warburg emerges as the loving, spoiled, and not always dutiful son. He had a liberal monthly allowance, but was often overdrawn. He was himself very generous to others, but he had the expensive tastes of a *grand seigneur* to which he had been accustomed at home, notwithstanding his mother's insistence on temperate modesty in all things. His frequent complaints about lack of funds and requests for more, with detailed explanations of his expenditure and of his need for yet another pair of trousers or a new morning coat (all to be made to measure within a week by the family's Hamburg tailor), or of the fare to Frankfurt to visit his grandparents, make odd reading at a time when his lecture and other notes already display his formidable intellectual complexity. He was of course, also at that time, systematically laying the foundations for his library.

The young Aby Warburg took it for granted that his allowance would be supplemented whenever necessary, and that his supply of clothing, delicacies, wine, and cigars would be kept up by regular parcels from his mother. On the rare occasions when it was not, the tone of his letters even to his mother became extremely cool. With all her comprehending concern—and Warburg acknowledged that she had always understood him—she was at times hurt by his attitude, and distressed when his morbid fear of illness and infection seemed to get the better of him. She was certainly aware that he was temperamentally unable to heed her advice—given only rarely and with restraint—to try to be less pessimistic, less given to worry. She sent him very affectionate and informative letters at least once a week; frequent postcards, invariably written in French or in English, reminded him of all birthdays on the Mittelweg and in the wider family: those were the years of engagements, marriages, and silver weddings for which Aby was encouraged to send telegrams, sometimes in witty verse. He enjoyed writing to his aunts and cousins; letters to them are unexpectedly full of playful banter. He also proved to be a keen dancer at their parties during his vacations (three of his *gages* are preserved, one in the shape of a tiny fan, with a miniature pencil still attached).

On January 10, 1887, Warburg wrote to his mother:

The abundant parcels from home coupled with the fact that I have nothing special on this evening make me already send off my weekly letter today. The most magnificent skates, the best kind of cigars, the choicest provisions, a most skilfully-fashioned fur cap—all that leaves me finding the German language too deficient in words of thanks. . . . My lectures resumed on Monday; the supply of wisdom is thus regularly assured once again. Since Friday I have also been fencing again, so that my *curriculum vitae* [he uses the word *Lebenslauf* ironically for this account of his day] is something like this: get up at 8.30, breakfast from 8.50 to 9.05, 9.15 lectures till 1.15; then grub—I can no longer call it anything else, for in the long run the meals are repulsive, especially since the cooking has become even worse—then at 2 o'clock rendezvous with my friends in the Café Scharrenbroich in the Market where we drink coffee and play cards [Skat] till 2.15; then I go to the barber Tropé on the Kaiserstrasse to be shaved and brushed and combed, and at 3.15 I attend Thode's lecture which lasts till 4.15; from 4.15 to 5.15 I have a fencing lesson, after which I hurry back to my digs where with my provisions from Hamburg I quickly make an example of the transitoriness of earthly things; from 6 to 8 I read or write letters. At 8.30 I go either to the students' club [*Kneipe*]—Tuesdays and Fridays—or, like this evening, to play skittles or billiards in the *Bürgerverein* of Bonn. At 11 p.m. (or early in the morning) I hit the hay. You see, dear Mother, I dispose relatively reasonably of my time. . . .

And again on January 31:

I thank you very much for the provisions which arrived half an hour ago; I had actually expected them last week . . . and had to make do with anchovies scrounged from Ruben and Roquefort which I bought myself. . . . Since I am "hinting" I should also like to say that for the past fortnight Hecht's very good red wine has only lived in my memory and I am waiting for its resurrection. Further, I should also like to ask you, dear Mama, to send me the contents of my money-box which could amount to ca. 200 M.; I must buy books and the money for that I really cannot squeeze out of my monthly allowance; also I want to have the high boots made. . . .

The high boots had been a bone of contention for some time: the parents thought that at

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70 M. they were an unwarranted luxury; Warburg considered them a necessity, for he was taking riding lessons in preparation for his military service, and knee-length boots rubbed destructively against his trousers while he sat on his horse. He eventually won. On February 10 he acknowledged the receipt of a crate of wine, adding that he had assumed that his mother would replenish his larder once a week.

The stay in Bonn was interrupted in 1888 when Warburg went to Munich for the summer semester to visit a major exhibition of contemporary art and to attend lectures on German medieval history and on Etruscan art. In October he, three of his fellow-students at Bonn, and four other students went to Florence for six months to join August Schmarsow, the professor of art history at Breslau, in an experiment designed to prove the need for the establishment of a German art historical institute in Florence (in which Warburg was to be much involved in subsequent years). Warburg remained in Florence until April 1889, and profited greatly from his conversations with Schmarsow and from his seminars on Masaccio and on Italian sculpture. He was happy to be able to pursue and to develop many other interests during this first contact with Italy. He had been asked to check the arrangement of collections in the Florentine museums for a revised edition of Baedeker, and described this in a letter to his mother of February 6, 1889, as "purely mechanical work, but tough in the unheated museums." He received a fee of twenty francs, the first money he had ever earned, which was spent on "an English hat, long desired but so far unaffordable." In later years he supplied detailed descriptions of Florentine works of art for further editions of the Baedeker guides.

Returning to Bonn for a final summer semester, Warburg went to the University of Strasbourg in October 1889. His teachers were the art historian Hubert Janitschek, the archaeologist Adolf Michaelis, and the philosopher Theobald Ziegler. On November 7, he sent another account of his daily "*Lebenslauf*" to his mother:

> The barber arrives at 7 o'clock and the morning coffee at 7.15 (with an egg, two rolls and a butter pat) which is put on a tray on a table in my sitting room. At 7.30 I have breakfast, gird myself with charm, and go to the lecture which begins at 8.15: it is Ziegler's history of modern philosophy, which I try hard to understand until 9 o'clock. Then I rush to our art historical seminar, hunt about in the library and am appalled by the amount of things which I do not know yet. From 12 to 1 Prof. Michaelis' lecture on Greek art. Then I go to eat in the "Germania," a huge place. . . . From 3–4 lecture by Janitschek on Italian painting—extraordinarily interesting, even though the time so soon after a meal is not favourable. From 4 to 8 back in the Institute. Three times a week seminars (two in the evening from 6 to 8, with Michaelis and Janitschek; Saturday morning 8–10 with Ziegler). For each seminar I have work to prepare. You can imagine that I have more than enough to do and little time for anything else. In addition, of course, I try to get on with my dissertation. . . .

On February 2, 1891, Warburg's father reported to him on a celebration that had taken place the day before in honor of A. Dorner, who had completed twenty-five years' service as *Einzelprokurist* (Head Clerk with full power of attorney) with M. M. Warburg & Co. Aby had sent a telegram. Moritz writes: "I made a brief speech and took as my motif what Iago says in *Othello*, Act III, Scene III: 'But he that filches from me my good name / Robs me of that which not enriches him, / And makes me poor indeed.' I have carried a copy of this scene in my pocket-book for circa 30 years, for it has always been my guiding principle to keep the name *immaculate*." It was rare for Moritz, who was affectionate but conventional in his mostly brief and business-like letters to his son, to show his feelings. His pronounced sense of rectitude was transmitted to all his children.

Warburg passed his doctoral examination with the highest marks, and, having submitted his thesis on Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" and "Primavera" in December 1891, left Strasbourg for good. When the thesis was published exactly a year later, with the subtitle "An investigation of ideas about the antique in the early Italian Renaissance," he dedicated it to his Strasbourg teachers Janitschek and Michaelis. In his working copy he kept a list of the hundred or so review and complimentary copies that he sent out to relatives, friends, all his university teachers, and to an already impressively wide group of international scholars which included Jakob Burckhardt, Giosuè Carducci, Salomone Morpurgo, and Adolfo Venturi. On the back of the dedi-

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cation page of this heavily annotated working copy, Warburg put a quotation from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, a book he first read in Strasbourg, about which he corresponded at length with his future wife, and which remained a favorite throughout his life: "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. (Dan. XII, 4). Surely the plain rule is, Let each considerate person have his way, and see what it will lead to. For not this man and that man, but all men make up mankind, and their united tasks the task of mankind."

In 1892 Warburg was in Berlin for a few months, attending lectures on psychology with a view to taking up medicine, a plan that he did not pursue after he had completed one year's military service. He quite enjoyed his life in the horse artillery at Karlsruhe, found himself to his surprise being asked to give lectures to some of the officers, and finished up as a non-commissioned officer in November 1893. In February 1894, he returned to Florence where he spent three very fruitful years on research that included his discovery of the Buontalenti drawings for the Florentine *intermedi* of 1589 (published in the 1895 *Commemorazione della Riforma Melodrammatica* by the Accademia del R. Istituto Musicale di Firenze, which elected him a member), and which was the first fruit of his lifelong interest in festivals.

Inspired by Karl Lamprecht's and Hermann Usener's teachings, and particularly by Usener's ideas about ancient religions, Warburg had become increasingly concerned with anthropology. He now wanted to study paganism at first hand, and the opportunity of a visit to the Pueblo Indians presented itself in 1895. His brother Paul had got engaged to Nina Loeb, and Warburg attended their wedding in New York on October 1. He met Nina's brother James, and the two became good friends. James Loeb, later the founder of the Loeb Classical Library, took Warburg on a visit to his old university, Harvard, and to Charles Eliot Norton, with whom he was to correspond. In a letter to Norton dated October 3, 1905, Warburg wrote:

> Before long I hope to be able to present to you the desired comprehensive book on relations between Flanders and Florence. In it I shall also be able to say something about the laws according to which "persisting types" live. For the history of style has its biological laws, even if they are not to be summarily comprehended according to the law of the "smallest dynamometer" and the "conservation of energy." I dare not hope that I shall come to America again; I must therefore be content with giving you my written assurance of the most sincere admiration and affection. "The unforgotten Days of Cambridge" constitute a distinctive page in my diary.

Warburg visited the Smithsonian Institution in Washington to prepare his journey to the Pueblos, Navahos, and Hopi, and was provided with helpful advice and many useful introductions. He set off via Chicago and Denver in November and was based in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, except for a short trip to California, until March 1896 when he began a two-month tour of the reservations in Arizona. (See F. Saxl, "Warburg's Visit to New Mexico," *Lectures*, London 1957.) The depth of Warburg's experiences among the Pueblo Indians is indicated by the fact that twenty-seven years later he gave a lecture on certain Pueblo rituals to his fellow patients at the psychiatric clinic in Kreuzlingen, where he had to spend several years after the First World War (the lecture was later published, in English translation, in the *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, II, 1938–39). Warburg kept up the contacts he had made on that journey for many years. On May 17, 1907, for instance, he sent a letter written in English to the ethnologist James Mooney, who, from 1885 until his death in 1921, worked at the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution:

> My dear Mr. Mooney, I was very glad to hear from Mr. v. Hornbostel that you are still the same fervident [*sic*] worker and I only wish that some day or other we shall meet again. Thanks very much for your letter. I receive the Reports of your admirable Institution, but I have not very often time enough to read them because my studies are once again the Renaissance period. Nevertheless I always feel myself very much indebted to your Indians. Without the study of their primitive (?) civilization I never would have been able to find a larger basis for the Psychology of the Renaissance. One day or other I shall send you a specimen of my method, which, I dare say, is new and therefore, perhaps, not as far acknowledged as I could expect. Nevertheless I work without losing the belief in the unknown master who directs our attention. My wife and three dear children are my most natural auditors in Germany. I shall be happy to hear more from you. In friendship. Yours Warburg.

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The woman Warburg had married in 1897 was Mary Hertz, the artist daughter of the Hamburg senator Adolph Hertz. There was a Jewish ancestor, but Senator Hertz, religiously and socially, belonged to the mercantile aristocracy into which he had also married. Warburg had been a friend since his student days of Mary's brother John, who asked him to be their cicerone when Mary and Senator Hertz visited Florence in December 1888. Warburg was immediately struck by Mary's intelligent response to art, and a friendship developed, with a frequent exchange of letters, which had to survive many storms before they finally became man and wife. The union was strenuously opposed by Aby's parents, and by Mary's parents who felt that the difference in religious upbringing and Aby's lack of professional status did not augur well. In the end the couple surmounted these and many other difficulties and announced their engagement in July 1897. The Warburg parents did not attend the wedding on October 13 but shortly afterwards visited Mary and Aby for a day on their honeymoon in Wiesbaden. At the end of that month the young Warburgs were on their way to Italy and established themselves in Florence, where they lived until 1904; and only a few weeks later Moritz Warburg refers to Mary in a letter as his "very dear daughter," the correspondence from then on becoming very affectionate on both sides. He also sent her, because as an artist she would appreciate it most, an etching that the Dutch painter Jozef Israëls had given him in return for a copy of Aby's dissertation. In November the Warburg parents paid a formal call on the Hertz parents, after which they were on friendly terms.

The question of the faith in which any children of the marriage were to be brought up had been debated many times by many members of both families—to Warburg's dismay, since he felt that this was a decision for him and Mary alone. In the event Mary, who was a practicing Protestant, sometimes took the three children to church, and Warburg, as long as his mother was alive, took them to the annual Seder in her house, providing, rather irreverently, German nursery rhymes for the traditional Hebrew songs.

In matters of orthodoxy and belief, Warburg was relentlessly unwilling to make any kind of compromise. In September 1908 he wrote to the chairman of the German-Israelitic Community in Hamburg: "I cannot accept that there was a misunderstanding on my part when I returned a questionnaire sent to me by the Jewish Community without further explanation, for instance that in this case it was compiling statistics of Jews, not as a religious body, but as an auxiliary statistical bureau of the State; for I am in no way subject to the Jewish Community, neither as member nor as object, rather I quite explicitly resigned from it and am to be regarded by it as a Dissident." "Dissident" had been a legal term in civil law for those without religion and freethinkers since the Prussian Constitution of 1850 had proclaimed freedom of religion.

Warburg's father died on January 29, 1910, a few hours after Warburg had paid him a bedside visit. Warburg did not attend the funeral. On January 30 he notes in his diary: "Tomorrow I am to bury my father. Can one?" On February 19 he wrote a letter to his brother Max, of which only a faded handwritten copy exists, with several gaps:

> I beg you to help me in a very difficult matter: after careful reflection I have been forced to the conclusion that it is impossible for me to participate in a public religious celebration for Father [a memorial service was to take place in his father's synagogue on February 27]. Rabbi Nobel and the Talmud Torah School have the right and the duty to celebrate Father as a steadfast Jew; they owe him this expression of thanks with a clear emphasis in that direction. With that the whole celebration acquires, in a natural and subjectively absolutely justified manner, the character of a demonstration for the faithful Jews. I do not wish to disturb this. I am after all in the eyes of others an unreliable customer, but in my own eyes a political opponent of clerical elementary schools such as the Talmud Torah School, and above all I am a "Cherem" [banned] through my mixed marriage and as the father of non-denominational children whom I shall never lead to Judaism.—Now *Minchah* [the afternoon prayer] will be recited. The Mourners' Kaddish is a matter for the eldest son: it signifies not only an external act, but at this public memorial service demonstrates acceptance of the moral inheritance. I will not make myself guilty of such public hypocrisy. No one is entitled to demand this of me. There remains the possibility that you would say the Mourners' Kaddish and I take part only in the general one. For anyone in the know this would be an even clearer abdication on my part as the chief moral heir of my father. That this is in fact the case I do not wish publicly [to show] though by no means to conceal, and that is why I want to stay

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away. I ask you to understand my attitude and to explain it as best you can to Mama, whom I have begged to be so good as to excuse me. Please spare me the humiliating situation of a dishonest public act on my part. I shall simply go on a journey or be ill; then the matter would look plausible to the outside world. No one will miss me anyhow: the *qehilla* and the stock exchange always regard you as the eldest, whose persona and duties—*in rebus publicis*—you have in any case assumed since long ago, to my unclouded and grateful satisfaction.

On February 25, two days before the memorial service, Warburg says in his diary:

Still more: to rend one's clothes, to put on carpet slippers, to say Kaddish, morning and night, regardless of whether one is oneself again attacked by demons: demonstration: "I do not abandon my family in these circumstances." The *qehilla* wants more: I am to take part in a mourning service requiring my active participation in the cult, thereby putting in these circumstances a clan-like seal on the moral inheritance of the members of the family. There is no style in this, especially if one respects Father. My respect for him lies in my not hushing up the absolute antithesis in *Weltanschauung* through an external cultic act: for I am dissident. To fulfil family ritual is a private matter: Kaddish in the synagogue a religious act. . . . This is enough to show people that my character of a Dissident must be respected just as much as the character of the Orthodox.

There had been a touching letter from his mother, also dated February 25 (written, as she says, to avoid a discussion which would be so upsetting for them both), hoping that in spite of all his scruples a benign spirit would help him to change his mind: all he would demonstrate by his attendance, as the eldest son, at a service intended to honor his father was his filial love and duty.

Equally, Warburg avoided "demonstrations" on the other side. One of his greatest friends in Florence was the Dutch philosopher and historian of literature, André Jolles. When Jolles got engaged to Tilli Mönckeberg in 1900, her parents traveled to Florence to meet him, and Bürgermeister Mönckeberg gave a very interesting description of the Warburgs and their Florentine circle at that time in his *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* (1918). The Warburgs went to Hamburg for the wedding celebrations, and Warburg notes in his diary, September 8, 1900: "Wedding. Not to church (better that someone should be surprised that we are not there than that we should be there)." Carl Georg Heise, Warburg's first pupil and later director of the Hamburg Kunsthalle, tells us in his moving *Persönliche Erinnerungen an Aby Warburg* (written, without access to his papers, during the final bombardments of Berlin in April 1945 and privately printed in New York in 1947) that Warburg declined to preside at the International Art Historical Congress held in Rome in 1912, which he had done so much, for years, to organize: "A Jew, he said, should not be President of a world organization, that was bound to discredit it. He would do the work, but the honor it was not for him to accept."

Warburg's preoccupations with Judaism had obviously never ceased. Not only the extensive Jewish section of his library, but the wealth of bibliographical notes and newspaper cuttings that he collected on Judaism reflect both his thinking about the role of the Jews in German society and his sensitivity to all symptoms of anti-Semitism. He first experienced one such manifestation during his Strasbourg days: in a letter to his mother of November 25, 1889, he talks about being depressed at the attitude, officially encouraged by the authorities, of the local population; he cannot go out in the daytime without hearing behind him several times, in Alsatian dialect: "Desch ischt e Jud!" Warburg's collection of press cuttings on contemporary Jewish questions is in two large folders, from 1901 to 1927, and of course covers the Dreyfus affair and accusations of ritual murder in Russia.

Exactly what was the relation between Warburg's research on paganism in the Renaissance and his meditations and fears about Judaism (and Jews) remains of course the problem.

A diary entry dated August 29, 1910, notes: "My motto from age 44 onwards: [in Greek] I have kept the faith. II. Tim. 4.7." At this point we may leave Warburg, on the threshold of middle age.

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Larkin Ascending

GEORGE WATSON

In one week in December 1985—a week without parallel in literary history—three English poets died.

It was the youngest of them, oddly enough—Philip Larkin—who seems to have left the largest gap in the consciousness of a mourning nation. The others were Robert Graves, who at ninety had spent most of his working life in Spain, having settled in Majorca in 1929; and Geoffrey Grigson, whose memory survives best as the influential editor of *New Verse* (1933–39) and the author of travel books and biographies.

Larkin, somehow, was something more; and the archivist of Hull University, where he spent the last thirty years of his life, mounted a little exhibition in his honor in the heart of a London where he had always greatly preferred not to live. It showed books, manuscripts, and a televised interview under the rotunda of University College, Bloomsbury, and attracted a small and steady trickle of admirers who neither wept nor chuckled, though some of the letters shown under glass were enough to make a cat laugh. "The old trouble—radio—is still very much with me," he wrote breezily to his first publisher, George Hartley. "I should like to build a public convenience for camels over the grave of Signor Marconi" (April 19, 1955). And when, thirty years later, he knew himself to be dying, he managed to turn even death into a quip: "My doctor assures me that I shall be a new man in a few months' time. Personally, I liked the old one, but he seems to have gone forever" (August 5, 1985). It is a badinage that sums up a personality too public and too apparent in his poems to be called private, and yet too inherently private to be called anything else. To those who knew him, Philip Larkin was like all of us—at least all of us born in the 1920s and raised during World War II—and yet like nobody else.

I first met him on a cold February afternoon in Hull in 1975, and in circumstances highly unpropitious. I had undertaken to lecture there, as an academic visitor from Cambridge, and on a topic—"The New Left"—so near to the hearts of some members of the audience that several among them left in indignation as I spoke. So far, so good: there is always something inspiriting to a lecturer about indignation. But nothing about the spectacle of a huge, moon-faced librarian seated in midhall in a large overcoat, staring disconsolately to left and right and with an air that might have indicated either disdain or total tedium. "It's not as bad as *that*," I wanted to shout at him. It was only later that I discovered that he was deaf: present at the lecture at all only because he had promised the vice-chancellor to be present at the ensuing dinner. But his face was known to me from photographs, and the word "curmudgeon" was mythically attached to his name. It was not a happy encounter.

In fact, as dinner proved, he was more fun than a circus. He had moved as a librarian from Belfast to Hull in 1954, the year his old Oxford friend Kingsley Amis dedicated his first novel, *Lucky Jim*, to him. The decision to become a librarian was carefully reflected on grounds of personality. He loved books and hated teaching. "Books are a load of crap"—one of his most celebrated lines of verse—is

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less a complaint against literature than against life, and a short period as a member of staff at Leicester University had taught him that the public platform was not for him. Leicester, if anything is, was the source of Amis's novel. I remember Larkin telling how Amis visited him there soon after the war, fresh from the army, sat in the staff room sniffing the atmosphere, and finally remarked, "Yes, I could stand this"; and he became a lecturer in 1949 in the University of Wales. Larkin took a contrary route and left pedagogy for good, usually declining even to read his own poems in public. "Feel my hand," he would ask a friend as they mounted a platform for some much-dreaded speechifying; and the hand would be not merely damp but *wet* with fear.

Libraries, in any case, were manageable, and Larkin took pride in his administrative skills and in his eccentric, well-researched anthology *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* (1973), which was based on five years of Hull reading topped up with six months in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The anthology was not altogether well received, but one never heard complaints about his library minutes. "They are very good minutes," he remarks proudly in a television interview, in his mock lugubrious voice. People were something else. Cronies apart (they too sometimes merited evasion), he was well known to use his office window as a sentinel post, escaping through a side door into the stacks of his library if he spotted anyone unwelcome advancing menacingly upon the building and upon him.

His chief drug was work. On his office desk sat a large china toad, one of the exhibits in the London memorial exhibition. The toad, of course, means routine work, which he often wondered why he could not do without:

> Give me your arm, old toad;
> Help me down Cemetery Road,

as he put it in *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), the third of his four volumes of verse. He needed work because, like many rapid minds, he found time heavy on his hands and wondered what people did when they were not occupied at anything in particular. But he also loved the loneliness of Hull, which is lonely in the special sense that people seldom visit it. It is not beautiful in itself; and unlike most British cities, it is not on the way to anything. Friends, not visitors, are what make such places. In his televised chat with Sir John Betjeman, he remarked that he lived in Hull because he had been given a job there—why else does anyone live anywhere? The remark evidently sounded quaint to Betjeman, a Londoner born and bred who worked hard, in his way, but never at a routine like librarianship.

Apartness had its advantages. Poetic pilgrims, I remember his remarking, seldom came his way, so that he was little bothered by the merely curious: they went to see Basil Bunting in the Lake District instead, the Lakes being on the way to Scotland. But Larkin was convivial among those he liked, and he seems to have liked most people he knew. His youth was reputedly merry, beer swilling, and reassuringly ordinary; his middle age, companionable and gay. Deafness came upon him suddenly, around the age of fifty, and he once said he had first noticed it when he realized he couldn't hear the birds singing. But he was far from curmudgeonly in company, even in his later years; and a cheerful obscenity, especially old-fashioned four-lettering, was crucial to his tactic of intimacy, a manner of declaring confidence and a hope to confide. His face was the face of a solemn clown: funny, somehow, like all good clowns, even before he had uttered. But there the resemblance ended. The classic clowns were silent men, and Philip Larkin was voluble. A master mimic, in spite of a stammer he had largely overcome, and a 1940s-style lover of American jazz, his company was vastly animated. In conversation he impressed, above all, by his sheer physical bulk, which was that of an awkward and weakly giant. Larkin was a big man in every dimension. In later life he dressed like a bank manager—black three-piece suits with a watch chain and (it is said) size twelve shoes. As a size ten wearer, I always found this last detail hard to credit, but his feet certainly looked large. He was so big that he is said to have had his shirts made for him, since ready-made garments never reached far enough below the waist, as he feared, to meet the requirements of decorum expected of a head librarian and the recipient of international literary prizes. The only sartorial license he appeared to allow himself was a pair of bright socks, which could on occasion be a livid orange.

That he was given to deep depression was

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to be believed: partly because in a general sense it is believable, partly because his intimates say so, but above all because his poems tell of it too truthfully to be gainsaid. The last poem to be published in his lifetime, which he ironically entitled "Aubade," or dawn-song, is about the fear of death that would strike at him alone in the small hours, waking to darkness and sensing "what's really always there"; and nobody who has read that poem can doubt that such fears were real. The very dismemberment of the body after death—its irreversible decay into indiscriminate matter—haunted his talk, his poems, and his dreams.

It was a fear that did not lead him to religion, only to a threshold of interest from which he could glimpse the sheer point of religion; and his most anthologized poem, "Church-going," documents a reverent secularism he held to the last. "A serious place on serious earth it is." His deeper thoughts were dark. His father died of cancer at the age of sixty-three, and he believed that he must do so, too, and did. So his blackest fears cannot be called baseless, though it is hard to see what basis they had. No doubt, even at the end, he would have been puzzled, and amused, by that question too. In his will he left nearly half-a-million dollars—an effect, it may be presumed, of an indisposition to spend—and an instruction to burn his unpublished papers unread.

For the odd truth is that even death, in that mouth and in that mind, was somehow funny. "As a protest," he once urged a militant student at Hull who was making a more-than-usual nuisance of himself, "have you ever thought of setting fire to yourself?" Death and disaster need to be funny because they are serious—like his enslavement to an office desk. In that office he kept a photograph of Guy the Gorilla, for long years one of the most famous beasts in the London zoo, as if sensing some affinity of fate between one famous bachelor and another, caged and daily on show. His public self-exposure was commonly one of comic despair, apt to one always ruefully proud of his own existential failure:

> Sexual intercourse began in 1963.
> That was just too late for me.

Thus one of his most famous poems begins—as if virginity, by the late twentieth century, were an attribute too absurd to be valued even for its extreme rarity. And if death and disaster can be made to look funny, then sexual frustration easily can too. He kept a spyglass on his desk, I was once told, to watch young women passing his office, appreciatively dubbing the best of them "honies"—his liveliest taste being for substantial ladies of a sort that once figured in stocking advertisements. I do not suppose anyone who knew him found any of this regrettable. Sexual frustration is hardly, of itself, a ground for concern: it is rather its absence that might easily be that. He was amused to like the way women looked, and ruefully conscious that he lacked the social graces to woo or win one. Though he pranced mightily, it is said, at the sound of his beloved jazz records, especially those by his adored Count Basie, he never learned how to dance on a dance floor; and though the most winning of hosts or guests, he probably died thinking himself a misfit.

What he loved above all was a good diatribe. Since the diatribe hardly exists as a literary form in its own right in modern English, unless as letters to newspaper editors, it has to survive in the context of other forms. My favorite among Larkin's work is his attack on children in "The Savage Seventh," a 1959 article he collected in his prose volume *Required Writing* (1983). I do not imply that I share its sentiments—my admiration is purely stylistic—but the passage amply illustrates a devil-may-care view of decorum that combines oddly with the character of a profoundly cautious man:

> It was that verse about becoming again as a little child that caused the first sharp waning of my Christian sympathies. If the Kingdom of Heaven could be entered only by those fulfilling such a condition, I knew I should be unhappy there. It was . . . having to put up indefinitely with the company of other children—their noise, their nastiness, their boasting, their back-answers, their cruelty, their silliness. Until I began to meet grown-ups on more or less equal terms, I fancied myself a kind of Ishmael. The realization that it was not people I disliked but children was for me one of those celebrated moments of self-revelation, comparable to reading Haeckel or Ingersoll in the last century. The knowledge that I should never . . . get mixed up with them again more than compensated for having to start earning a living.

That looks like comic writing of a high order,

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and indeed Larkin's *Required Writing* was a success surprising to author and publisher alike—Faber and Faber having thought so little of it that they issued it in paperback only, and without an index. *The Bottom of the Barrel*—so he wrote to me cheerfully in November 1983—is what he himself wanted to call it.

> I'm afraid it may institute a personality cult, at least to judge from the reviews, which would be most retrograde to my desire. I've never admired the T. E. Lawrence practice of hiding in a cave, then running up a red flag to show you were there.

Success sat uncomfortably on him, though honors like the Shakespeare Prize in Hamburg, the Companionship of Honor conferred upon him in the last months of his life, and the Laureateship that he refused, moved him to an ungrudging gratitude. He was thankful, in the end, to be loved.

In 1984 his old friend Sir John Betjeman died as poet laureate, after a long illness and protracted speculation about his probable successor. The clever money, from the start, was on Philip Larkin: partly because he looked like the best poet resident in the United Kingdom; partly because he observed the nation, and the nation's joys and woes, as laureates should do; and partly because he was by then, and publicly, a Thatcherite—and the laureateship is awarded by the sovereign on the recommendation of the prime minister.

The clever money would have lost. Larkin, though offered the post by Mrs. Thatcher, declined it. His reasons are likely to have been various. He may by then have known that he was dying, though the world did not; he certainly believed he had stopped being a poet; and he had a marked horror of official occasions. "I can't *do* it any more," he told a friend sadly in his last years, as they talked of poetry. And I recall his saying before he was much past fifty, when I commended his last collection, *High Windows* (1974): "Yes, but could I do it now?" It was a joke one was meant to take seriously. "Mind you," he remarked on refusing the laureateship, "Mrs. Thatcher took it awfully well." So did Ted Hughes, once Sylvia Plath's husband, who was duly appointed in his place. "I'm *not* going to be Mr. Poetry," Larkin is said to have told his Hull friends. His written explanation to me was more a matter of relations and influences, since he knew me as one whose trade is literary history. "I should have been a sort of inferior Betjeman."

Which he was not, though he was right to sense a link.

There is a nameless tradition in English poetry, a distinct subspecies of social verse whose roots are eighteenth century, which flowered most mightily in Byron, especially in the last cantos of *Don Juan*. It trickled down through the nineteenth century among lesser lights like Winthrop Praed and Arthur Hugh Clough, and so down to W. H. Auden in the 1930s and to Betjeman soon after. It is easier to characterize than to name, easier to illustrate than to characterize. I suppose it to be distinctively English, but that may be mere ignorance: at all events I do not know of equivalents in other lands. It is like semi-learned conversation vivified into social performance—the best sort of conversation, some would say—and then put to verse, usually rhyming verse to sharpen the sense of performance. It is about the world under our noses, much as a realistic novel is, but marked (as fiction less often is) by a sustained flippancy of mood masking a deep commitment of purpose—a purpose that can easily include hatred, contempt, and dread. The notion of putting comic realism to verse was bound to occur to someone, and most probably to someone in England, after its triumph in prose fiction. Why should an idea so potent be confined to prose?

In a letter he sent me two years before he died, Larkin remarked of his death-fearful "Aubade" that it had made him want to "write some realistic poems—not the romantic cheerful stuff I have written up till now." An odd judgment, which shows he had thought about the issue but grabbed at it from the wrong end. Larkin was always a realistic poet, at least from his second collection, *The Less Deceived* (1955), and in a tradition built for him by Byron, Auden, and Betjeman: good talk put to rhyming verse. But poems in this century, by and large, need to be short, and realism is a form that has traditionally made a lot of space for itself. Samuel Richardson used to take about a million words to make a point about the sexual morality of his age. A poet in our time, by contrast, has to work more like a cat burglar. He finds an easy entrance, moves fast once he is inside, takes notice only of

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what he has room for, and is out of the place in a minute or two. Richardson would not have been happy with that. But cat burgling was always Larkin's way; it was usually Betjeman's before him, though Betjeman also essayed a long verse-autobiography called *Summoned by Bells* (1960), where he pays a large price for a lack of concision; and brevity was most commonly Auden's way, too, though he sometimes allowed himself to exceed a hundred lines. To find novel-length realism in English verse, on the whole, you have to go back to the last century, to Byron's *Don Juan* or Clough's *Amours de voyage*—though Vikram Seth has just dared it again in a verse-novel called *The Golden Gate*.

Larkin's world, however, was not Betjeman's or Auden's. Betjeman was a close acquaintance of Larkin. Auden, as Larkin tells in an interview collected in *Required Writing*, he met only once; and in a review later on in the same collection, he confines the value of Auden's poetry to his first ten years, or roughly the 1930s. But he could see that Auden was the social poet of the early century, and it is no accident that one of the best essays ever written on Byron is a *New Yorker* review by Auden of the Texas edition of *Don Juan*, eventually collected in *The Dyer's Hand* (1962).

The briskest way to distinguish the three great Byronists of the century might be extra-literary, or in terms of social rank. Auden's roots were professional, Anglo-Catholic, and bookish—the sort of bookish family that makes curious learning a staple of mealtime conversation and solves highly allusive crossword puzzles in Sunday newspapers. Betjeman's father, by contrast, had a family business that the young man refused to enter, and his writings strike me as suffused with a snobbery internal to the British middle classes: the superiority of one middle-class suburb over another, usually on grounds of age, of old wealth over new. Aristocrats and the lower orders hardly come into it. Betjeman was discriminatory within a social spectrum deliberately confined; and "business-executive," with its strong suggestion of the parvenu, was one of his favorite terms of disapprobation. Betjeman's *Collected Poems* of 1958 shows that a one-class world can still be a snobbish one. His poems worry angrily, contemptuously, or affectionately about how other people can *be* what they are, in their dress, their gait, and their manners. The poet of suburban Britain, it was his supreme achievement to bring the suburb, where most citizens of the industrial world now live, into the range of art.

Larkin's poems are not primarily about other people at all. They record an inner voice and its haunting disquiets and abject accommodations to outer experience. A reading of Thomas Hardy, whose collected poems Larkin once boldly called "the best body of poetic work this century so far has to show"—better than Yeats or Eliot or Stevens or Auden, in fact—had taught him to listen to himself, and to trust what he heard: "not to be afraid of the obvious." Perhaps this is why he thought himself a romantic, and certainly his admirations were all for that. "The poet takes note of nothing that he cannot feel" was a dictum of Hardy's he loved to quote. And yet Larkin seldom writes like Hardy, though one everywhere senses the debt, mainly in negative terms: in his bluntness, and in his alacrity to leave things out and to stab hard at the point—and one point will always do for a poem, even the best—without circumlocution or fuss.

Larkin was not a romantic but a social realist, and when he died he had already done the thing he fondly imagined was still to be done. And how can one write social realism about oneself? First, by turning oneself into a character—and both he and Betjeman, who far excelled him as a media man, abundantly did that—and analyzing that character after it has been created; and second, by generalizing from private experience. The fear of death that Larkin suffered is not exactly the *timor mortis* that perturbed our devout ancestors, but it is not altogether something else. They worried about hellfire: Larkin about the sheer ugly finality of the thing. But he also had the gift of looking at the suburban world he knew and catching the sense of it as a whole. There is an uncollected poem of his called "Breadfruit"—uncollected, I suspect, because he thought it a trifle too flippant—which illustrates his summarizing sense to the full. The poem, which is a mere sixteen lines, begins with adolescent desire,

> Boys dream of native girls who bring breadfruit,

moves briskly on through teenage courting, marriage, mortgages, kids, illness, and old age, and ends:

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> Maturity falls, when old men sit and dream
> Of naked girls who bring breadfruit
> Whatever they are.

That swift anatomy of suburban life is only superficially amusing. If Larkin did not know what breadfruit were, there were encyclopedias enough in the Hull University Library that could easily have told him. The poem is acutely social in substance; and yet it is ultimately self-exploring. A public view is private, too, for the watcher here is the strongest presence in the work. With Auden we looked at the Western world; with Betjeman, at England; but with Larkin we are looking at Larkin. It is not the familiar ground of desire, procreation, and death that the poem chiefly records, but the mind that sees it and accepts it. (Betjeman did not accept it.) Pointless it may be, this life of ours; but it is a lack of point we can be amused and instructed by. It can certainly be borne, since far worse things are borne. In Larkin, Wordsworth's "wise passiveness" turns rueful and acquiescent. Life means putting up with it. By almost complaining, he shows how not to complain; much as "Church-going," the poem that made him famous, showed how by almost worshiping we need not worship.

Now that the obsequies are over, the laureateship of England firmly held in youthful and defiant hands, and an exhibition mounted and packed away, it is possible to see that Larkin, no less than Grigson and Graves, was the recorder of a British mood that had passed away before their death one week in 1985. To reread his poems, or visit the exhibition, is to recall another land and another time. This is not England now. Larkin may have ended his days a Thatcherite, impatient of public overspending, the excesses of youth culture, and the truculence of union bosses; but his creative mind belongs to the decade well before Mrs. Thatcher became leader of the Conservative party in 1975 or prime minister in 1979.

It belongs, as "Breadfruit" illustrates, to a world of consciously narrow horizons and strenuously limited hopes: to the depressed thirties, the rationed forties of wartime and post-war thrift, the hopeful fifties when prospects widened but never as far as in more buoyant lands such as Japan, Germany, or the United States. Larkin always praises the passive above the active. In the title poem of *The Less Deceived*, a collection that Robert Lowell commended for having "caught the moment," a girl drugged and raped is called less deceived than the ruffian who had paid for the privilege of enjoying her virginity. That is not the spirit of modern Thatcherism. Larkin rationed his desires as men once rationed meat and butter. Never was passion so bridled, thought so self-confined, ambition so tamed and stilled.

On the day that Larkin's death was announced, another English poet, Andrew Motion, who has since been commissioned to write his life, called him the Thomas Gray of the twentieth century. There are pale resemblances in their common love of conscious crafting, in their modest output, and in their stylish melancholy. But the Britain of the 1980s that celebrates Larkin's genius with a warmth he would surely have found embarrassing—"This is the worst day of my life," he would mutter as he mounted a public platform—is no longer a Larkinesque world. It has forgotten rationing, whether of substance or of spirit. Its horizons are no longer narrow, at least for the four-fifths and more who are in work: in fact, young students seem to take a future of affluence so much for granted that it hardly makes sense to say they want to be rich, since they can hardly conceive of any other fate. The Big Bang that internationalized the London money markets in November 1986—now the largest in the world—expressed a mood with a symbolism that looks effortlessly accurate. Bang or bust, riches are the mood of the moment. It is no longer vulgar to be wealthy, or wicked either, or improbable. Poverty has not been abolished—far from it. But it has, so to speak, been efficiently forgotten by a good half of the nation, and the rhetoric of compassion looks for the moment too stale to mobilize a crowd or inspire a cause.

All of which leaves the poet of limitations serenely and benignly a poet of the English past. I do not imagine Larkin would have resented it. It is something, after all, to have chronicled an age, and to watch it fade, and to realize before one is sixty that one can chronicle no more. Hard, all the same, to realize that he is not there—in Hull, or anywhere; harder still to realize that the sober and steadfast England he once knew has disappeared as irrecoverably as he.

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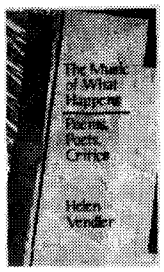

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Literary Charlatanism

A. J. A. SYMONS: HIS LIFE AND HIS SPECULATIONS. *By Julian Symons. Oxford University Press. £4 95d.*

Reviewed by JACOB A. STEIN

In the course of a law practice of what is now close on to forty years, I have met a good number of charlatans and confidence men. What has surprised me about them is how little amusement they extracted from their frauds. There were no Felix Krulls among them. They did not, as Felix Krull did, privately drop the mask and reflect on the arts of deception. They did not see themselves as Georg Lukacs said that Thomas Mann saw Krull. For Mann, the confidence man, someone such as Krull, was the only person who could enjoy himself in a bourgeois society. He placed himself outside it so he could manipulate it. He was in it but not of it. He turned whatever happened to his own advantage. He is the picaresque saint.

The confidence men I met were not anti-bourgeois. On the contrary, they sought the bourgeois approval that comes with the possession of the ready cash they extracted from their greedy victims.

Mann also believed that art at bottom was trickery. There is a good deal to this theory. As an example, Rembrandt's painting of the belt buckle surrounding the generous girth of a nobleman is a deception. Rembrandt takes a few colors, yellow and white and perhaps a bit of green, and converts the dabs into polished gold. It is a trick of the eye, a form of close-up magic, destroyed by close inspection. Are the charlatan's deceptive skills transferable to the art of fiction writing? It does not seem so. Charlatans who are also gifted writers are rare.

Some years ago a friend with whom I was discussing this subject recommended I read the biography of Baron Corvo, called *The Quest for Corvo: Genius or Charlatan* by A. J. A. Symons. It was suggested that Corvo was indeed a charlatan who wrote a memorable work of fiction.

The edition of *The Quest for Corvo* that first came my way contained a preface by Lord Birkett, the distinguished English barrister and judge. Birkett stated that *The Quest for Corvo* is a biography built up much like a lawyer or a detective collects evidence. A. J. A. Symons did not describe Corvo's life from the birth of his subject to his death. Symons presented the details of Corvo's life based on a chronology determined by the chance sequence of the interviews Symons used to create his portrait of Corvo. When Symons is through, we know a great deal about Corvo, and about Symons, and also a great deal about each witness who gave evidence.

Corvo's memorable literary work was his novel, *Hadrian the Seventh,* published in 1904. Although fiction, it reveals many aspects of Corvo's life. George Arthur Rose, the hero, is a rejected candidate for the priesthood, as Corvo was in real life. George Arthur Rose, in contrast to Corvo, is finally granted priestly orders. Thereafter, through a series of astonishing events, Rose is elected Pope and chooses the name Hadrian VII. He then sells the Vatican's treasures and gives the money to the poor. The story is Corvo's retribution told in a heavily brocaded style.

Corvo must be marked down as one of those charlatans with the personality traits I have met in my practice. He had no sense of humor. He persisted in his spurious claims despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. He never dropped the mask. The name, Baron Corvo, was itself a misrepresentation. The poor Englishman, Frederick William Rolfe, took the title Baron Corvo and defiantly claimed he was entitled to a place in Italian aristocracy. When Corvo died in Venice in 1913, he left behind a pile of bills and a string of broken promises. He also left behind a trail of misused people who found him to be a truly unforgettable scoundrel.

In A. J. A. Symons, Corvo found an understanding biographer. In several respects Symons had a number of Corvo's weaknesses. Alphonse James Albert Symons abandoned his given name and used the initials A. J., adapted from E. W. Hornung's fictitious society jewel thief, A. J. Raffels. A. J., as did Corvo, projected many literary projects that never came into existence. A. J., as did Corvo, found his life filled with unusual characters. And A. J., as did Corvo, left behind a large number of people who found A. J. one of the most unforgettable persons they ever met.

JACOB A. STEIN is a practicing attorney in Washington, D.C.

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A. J. A. Symons is the subject of a biography written by his brother, Julian Symons, the well-known authority on detective literature. It was published in 1950, but it was soon out of print. Now it is back in print. *The Quest for Corvo* has been available since it was first published in 1934. So now, for the first time in many years, both of these books that make a significant addition to the literature of literary charlatanism are available. Each complements the other.

There probably would have been no biography of A. J. A. Symons if he had not distinguished himself by writing *The Quest for Corvo*. There would have been no *Quest for Corvo* without the financial assistance rendered to A. J. A. Symons by J. Maundy Gregory or, to give him his full name, Arthur John Peter Michael Maundy Gregory. Gregory was described by his biographer, Tom Cullen, as one of the great English con men of all time, in the tradition of such fabulous frauds as the South Sea Bubble and the Tichborne claimant.

Gregory was known as "the man who knew too many secrets"—and that he did. He was David Lloyd George's bagman in the sale of honors. Gregory knew how knighthoods were obtained and how much they cost. During Gregory's time a knighthood went for ten thousand pounds. Baronetcies cost more, some forty thousand pounds, because they could be handed down from father to son. The sale of honors and the dealings with Maundy Gregory are two of the ineradicable stains on Lloyd George's reputation. Maundy Gregory pled guilty to the sale of honors. Later he had to flee England when threatened with a more serious prosecution—murder. Gregory died in France in 1941.

In one of his odd excursions into matters irrelevant to the honors traffic, Gregory took an interest in Corvo and in A. J. A. Symons. A. J. was only thirty-three when he wrote *The Quest for Corvo*. He was dead by age forty-one. He compressed in his short life the career of a writer, a dandy, a gourmet, and a bibliophile. He was a founder of the Wine and Food Society and of the First Editions Club. He was a great collector of Victorian music boxes. His brother said, "He skated throughout his life on a thin financial ice [as did Corvo] which somehow bore him to the end; that, rising from modest origins which he romanticized when necessary [as did Corvo] he expressed at the age of twenty-one his intention to build his life 'as an architect plans a house.' The ends of this life were the attainment of social position and literary fame, and every step in it was to be made with the carefulness shown by one Grandmaster playing another at chess."

Maundy Gregory appeared to A. J. as the man who had already attained the social position and worldly success A. J. wanted. Gregory displayed it with the fitting ostentation that A. J. thought appropriate. Here is A. J.'s description:

> Mr. Gregory (or, as he was formally announced, Mr. Maundy Gregory) proved to be a plump, rubicund, middle sized man in the fifties, with an expensive flower in his buttonhole, an air of constant good-living, an affable smile, a glittering watchchain, good clothes, and (as I noticed when he sat down) very beautiful boots.

A. J. described Maundy Gregory's exit after their first meeting. It was an exit that A. J. filed away for later use.

> We parted after more than an hour's talking, with mutual asseverations of goodwill, and undertaking on his part to lunch with me a few days later. As I escorted him to the door a waiting taxicab drew forward from beyond, and without a word my visitor stepped in. "Goodness," I exclaimed, "has that cab been waiting for you all this time?" "Oh yes," replied Mr. Gregory, "You see, I own it." And, with a bland salutation, but no direction to the chauffeur, he drove away.

A. J. is fascinated by the cuff links, the gold cigarette case (a gift from the king of Greece), and the black pearl in the tie. A. J. was soon to be Gregory's guest for lunch at the Ambassador Club, where they would discuss Corvo's writings. Waiters hovered. Fine food was followed by fine cigars and brandy. This time Gregory had another set of unforgettable cuff links and a cigarette case given to him by the duke of York.

"We talked for hours. I was hardly surprised to learn when, at four o'clock, looking around the magnificent but now empty restaurant, he whispered confidentially, 'Of course this place belongs to me.'"

Through Gregory's help, A. J. came upon obscure writings of Corvo. However, as time went by, the meetings between A. J. and

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Gregory became less frequent and the association ended as strangely as it began. A. J. was in favor of such people as Gregory. He hoped that someday he, too, might have his own collection of cuff links, cigarette cases, and pearl stickpins. If he did he would know how to use them to best advantage, having learned from the master, Maundy Gregory.

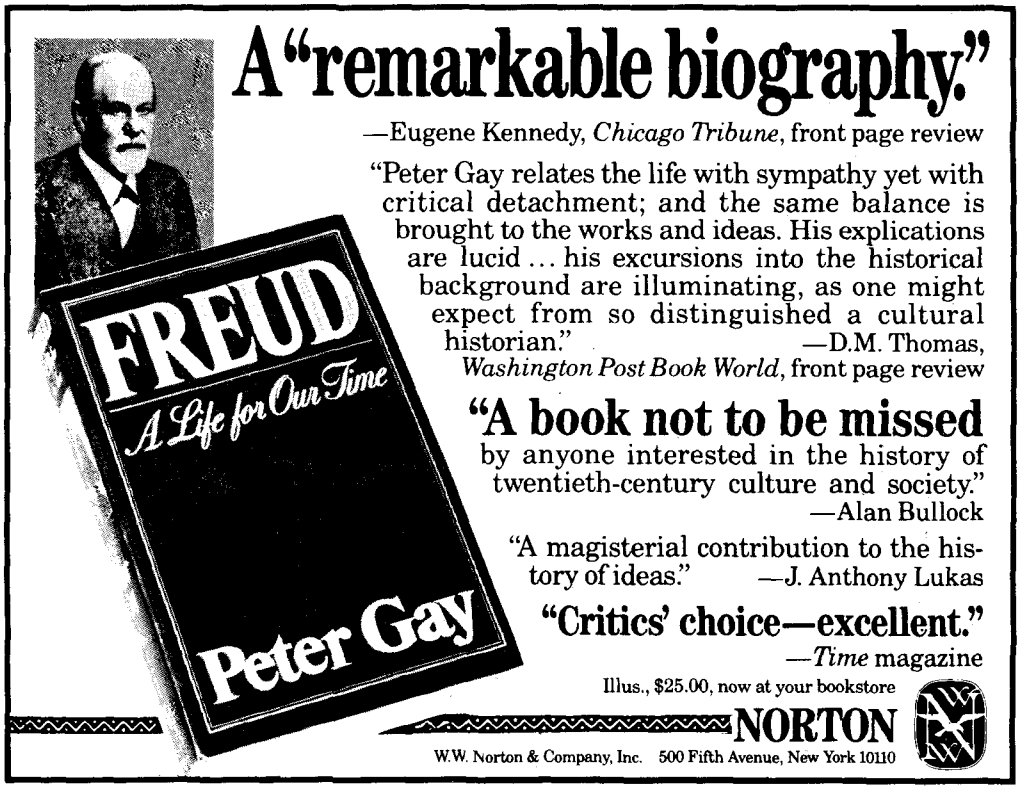
A. J., despite his love of glitter, had the gift of insight. He shows it in his summary of the sad life of Corvo. In the chapter entitled "Epitaph," he sorts out the influences that were at war in Corvo.

> The twisted career so sharply ended prompts questions which the wisest cannot answer. There is no easy explanation of genius or talent: they exist and we accept them as facets of creative force. Some measure of artistic power or sensibility is inherent in all humanity; "genius" is as good a word as any to denote those exceptional beings in whom, unaccountably, it rises to full force. And Rolfe was a defeated man of genius.

A. J. in some ways was also a defeated man of genius. His life was too short and his works too few. The crisscross of the lives of Corvo, A. J., and Gregory, and the fact that A. J.'s brother wrote a splendid biography that draws it all together, is one of the pleasant curiosities of literature.

A. J.'s pleasure in the performance of Maundy Gregory points up a significant difference between A. J. and Corvo. A. J. was unenvious of Gregory. That there was such a man as Gregory confirmed A. J.'s basic optimism that such things were possible, and with luck and opportunity he could duplicate Gregory's success in his own way. The Wine and Food Society had such possibilities, but, just as friendly breezes were filling every sail, World War II intervened, followed shortly by A. J.'s death in 1941. Up to the time of his death he was still planning projects. He has summarized his own career with the words, "No one so poor has lived so well."

Julian Symons ends his biography of A. J. as A. J. ends his biography of Corvo, with an analysis of the contradictory elements that were concealed behind the self-constructed mask. Both Corvo and A. J. wanted fame, and both achieved it with the one minor masterpiece. *Hadrian the Seventh* was converted into a play some years ago and had a successful Broadway run. Corvo's name popped up in a recent *New York Times Book Review*. A. J.



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lives on in *The Quest for Corvo.* The Penguin edition alone has sold more than one hundred thousand copies, and on it goes. Julian Symons's biography of A. J. is a unique work and is earning its own special reputation, as proven by its re-publication.

Of the three writers, two of them, Corvo and A. J., invested their own lives with fiction in order to supply what life inadvertently withheld. Both of them would be surprised to find that life chose to give them an afterglow beyond even their special capacities for expanding the limits of the possible.

Ironic, Isn't It?

THE ALLURING PROBLEM: AN ESSAY ON IRONY. *By D. J. Enright. Oxford University Press. $21.95.*

Reviewed by PAT ROGERS

"The pleasantest thing in life is doubtless ever the pleasantness that has found one off one's guard." Thus begins Henry James on his visit to the little Somerset cathedral town of Wells in 1872 (the essay is reprinted in *English Hours).* It is a characteristic Jamesian formulation, with the unexpectedly passive *found* where the normal verb might be *caught*, and so inflicting its own little diversionary assault on the reader. That is generally how irony works; it wakes us up to meanings more rudely than most modes of literary disclosure; it rests on the assumption that we are a little off our guard, and the "pleasantness" often resides in our sense of achievement in spotting what is going on. Effective ironies commonly leave not just the writer but also the reader feeling in strong control. For the reader it is that little bit better, since the author knew all along how the irony was going to unveil itself.

Irony is easy to generalize about in this way, because we still don't have a true poetics of the mode. Apart from more specialized studies, there are two outstanding attempts to remedy this situation. In D. J. Enright's new book, subtitled *An Essay* but in some ways more of a commonplace book interspersed with a running commentary, he says that these were the two books that proved exceptions to an otherwise binding rule—that commentators on irony were sufferers from "an undeveloped sense of humour" and "an overdeveloped taste for scientific method, or the outward appearance of it." Enright then generously concedes that it was D. C. Muecke, with *The Compass of Irony* (1969), and Wayne Booth, with *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), who "gave me the most to think about, the worst headaches and, by having opened up territory I was all set to break new ground in, the acutest pain." Further, Enright acknowledges that these works "have said excellent things, and said them finely, and I shall be making liberal use of them hereafter. A sound principle is, if you can't beat a saying, borrow it." A winning modesty or a cunning double bluff meant to forestall any critic who should discover suspicious links between Enright and his predecessors? Let's avoid a direct answer to that question, for it requires some elucidation of Enright's whole enterprise.

Enright's approach can be explained partly by means of a comparison with Muecke and Booth. There is less to say about the latter, because Booth's book is much the better known; it is a more or less formal rhetoric of a recognizable kind, and it provides Enright with less direct aid. But the impress is visible in several passages (as where Enright is discussing ironies undetectable by those involved) and more generally in a refusal to allow taxonomic zeal to overpower critical response. The links with Muecke's fine and underrated study are more obvious. It is not hard to discern particular sets of the ironic mind that Muecke uncovered and that Enright uses, breezily and good-humoredly, in his very different treatment of the subject—where Muecke is orderly (almost excessively so), painstaking, comprehensive, Enright is rapid, digressive, unbuttoned. And, pursuant to his own admission, Enright borrows passages and examples from Muecke. Nothing wrong with that, and of course Enright has some good instances of his own.

Muecke had devoted only one short chapter to "Ironic Situations," whereas a high proportion of Enright's cases in point are drawn from ordinary living rather than from literature—they take the form of life's little ironies as displayed in newspaper stories, or what the

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Concise Oxford Dictionary (cited at the outset) calls the "ill-timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance in itself desirable, as if in mockery of the fitness of things." Enright mentions examples such as a report from Peking (as it was, and maybe will continue to be in literary chat) on "how thirteen people were killed while crossing a railway track on their way to a funeral." Another report is about a New Yorker who was "suing the estate of a banker's widow who in a suicide leap from the nineteenth floor had landed on him" (the syntax is precise—it is the widow, not the banker, as one might first suppose, who did the leaping). Are these "ironic" in the same way as the elaborate literary deceptions treated elsewhere? Usage suggests the answer is yes, and Enright seems to think that usage is a reliable guide. Irony is what we call irony; there is a brief moment of regret that there is only one word for "so ubiquitous and multitudinous . . . a phenomenon," but then Enright sees that this is itself an irony, and so he is instantly cheered.

The most interesting point of comparison can be located in the opening hesitations of the writers. Muecke had remarked, "It might perhaps be prudent not to attempt any formal definitions," but in practice he doesn't observe this self-denying ordinance, since taxonomic schemes do imply boundaries and interconnections, therefore in effect definitions. Enright's first chapter is entitled "Definitions?" and the question mark resembles facetious punctuation rather than anything that would normally be called ironic. Insofar as the author has a message, it is a doctrine of scattered particulars. Like some Lichtenberg of our days, Enright throws out independent observations whose truth is validated by their lack of congruence with what has gone before. He is master of the aberrant, the unclassifiable, the exceptional, or the incommensurate. Classifiers like Booth and Muecke strain to bring disparate phenomena under one manageable scheme. Enright will not commit himself to saying that definitions are impossible, because that in itself would be an asserted position, a willed effort to report on the general condition of irony. His inclination is to slip lightly from one expression to another, and thus to leap across the categories that theorists have tried to mark off.

Enright doesn't seem to have much time for

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the view that irony is endemic to the modern world, as the reflection of a kind of cosmic absurd in which we are all embroiled; he does not even look at some of the authors generally invoked in this argument (Chekhov, for instance, tellingly used by Charles I. Glicksberg in *The Ironic Vision in Modern Literature*, 1969). For that matter, regulars not long on parade here include Kafka, Anatole France, and Pirandello. Instead, Enright makes frequent appeals to German-speaking authors (as his background in German culture would suggest): Goethe, Heine, Thomas Mann, Musil. But Shakespeare is unusually prominent too. Socrates is there as seen by Kierkegaard; there is no full-scale exploration of an entity known as Socratic irony, any more than there is of cosmic or dramatic irony. As for romantic irony, Enright admits to the common Anglo-Saxon difficulty with this notion: "Only fear of cowardliness accounts for the presence of this chapter. I find the theory of romantic irony hard to grasp." The academic critics whom he assembles on this topic are certainly enough to make anyone doubt the value of the concept: here is one—"The dialectic of its tensions is to permeate every facet of the aesthetic artefact, shaping its outer and inner configuration, and this dynamic is to act as the propellant for the advance towards transcendence. The destructive de-creation of irony is envisaged as a vital step for the subsequent re-creation on a higher plane." The dizzying succession of comatose metaphors here makes reading an almost nauseating experience, like being buffeted about in a gyroscope. But it is wrong to use such opacities as an excuse not to grapple with the ideas of significant thinkers such as Friedrich Schlegel. Enright would probably agree with that, but the slight disadvantage of his casual approach is that harmless fun can be confused with serious devaluation.

It follows from what I have been saying that most of Enright's most memorable utterances are made in passing, and can escape the attention of a reader bent on sustained critical argument. Often chapters end with a trenchant one-and-a-half-liner: "Moreover, one wouldn't wish to be one of those who would restrict knowledge to what can actually be said." His neat wordplay regularly scores off earlier phrasings: "Irony's armour helps us to bear the sufferings of others." What he says is often smart, often wise, sometimes both: "We would not inflict a show of our own quivering sensibility on a bereaved mother; but nor would we try to console her with clever remarks, even with irony's laconic wisdom." That is properly humane; and so is the comment on an example of Czech censorship: "Executions don't always give the executed a new lease of life. Once again the ironic perspective fails to allay our fears." And apropos of Antony's speech after the murder of Caesar: "Repetition doesn't always strengthen a statement; by providing time for doubt, it can erode or overturn it." Enright is at his best on Proust, a writer whose ironies are seldom consoling: "Proust's dicta resemble proverbs in that, while they are all in varying degrees persuasive, some of them are contradicted or modified by others; they are akin to Imlac's inconsistencies [in *Rasselas*], which cannot all be right but, where humans are concerned, can all be true." Finally, the citation of a bitterly sympathetic judgment by Proust on two maids in the *Cities of the Plain* section: " 'They will never read books, but neither will they ever write any.' This must be the only kind word a writer has ever found to say for non-readers."

Civilized, amusing, a little arbitrary in organization and tangential in approach, this essay delivers what it promises, and (somewhat rarer) promises what it delivers. It is a causerie rather than a thesis, an illumination by example and by incidental gloss. Muecke and Booth can rest assured that their standing as required reading has not been put in jeopardy; but then Enright is the sort of writer whose readers are drawn not by the compulsions of assignment but by the congenialities of taste and humor.

Grandstanding

SPORTS SPECTATORS. *By Allen Guttmann. Columbia University Press. $24.95.*

Reviewed by STEPHEN MILLER

Early in August thousands of country music listeners were left in the lurch when WHN in New York, which broadcast country music,

STEPHEN MILLER is the editor of *Soviet East European Report*, a newsletter published by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. He is also the author of many essays on cultural and political questions.

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became WFAN—the nation's first all-sports radio station. Those who tune in to WFAN can look forward not only to actual sports events but to many hours of sports chatter along the lines of a recent late-night interview with a National Hockey League star who answered phone calls about why he is the most penalized player in the league. He also gave recipes from his forthcoming cookbook.

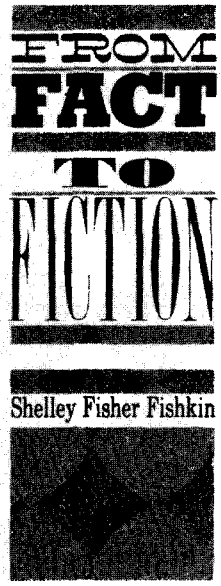
WFAN is imitating ESPN, the cable sports channel, which broadcasts sports-related programming twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Though the audience for professional football has decreased slightly during the past five years, it is far from clear that sports watching (or listening) is in decline. Obviously, the owners of WFAN or ESPN don't think so.

It is also obvious that sports fans are legion in the United States. More than 63.2 million Americans watch professional football regularly. Baseball is not far behind—attracting 62.7 million viewers, and 17 percent of American adults watch professional wrestling, and 8 percent watch weight lifting.

Statistics tell only part of the story. In some areas of the country, sports are not merely an important part of life, but at times it seems as if they are at the center of life. In Texas, according to one observer, "college football matters more than anything." Fanatical sports fans are to be found throughout the country and in all professions—from big businessmen to professors of sociology, from poets to plumbers. What, if anything, are we to make of the salience of sports in American life?

Ever since the Greeks, intellectuals have made much of the virtues acquired from playing sports, but until recently little has been written about that far more common creature: the sports fan. In recent years, the sports fan has been subjected to the severe gaze of several neo-Marxists, who have judged him wanting. As Allen Guttmann summarizes the neo-Marxist view of sports fans in his excellent book *Sports Spectators*: "Drained of all hostility by the spectacle of aggression, the fans are devoid of any interest in political action. They are apathetic, infantilized, cretinized; in a word dehumanized."

Guttmann thinks this portrait is inaccurate. The charge of political apathy, he says, is not backed by "empirical data." Of course, it isn't easy to get data that correlates the relationship



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between sports watching and political outlook. For one thing, the particular sport should be specified, since according to demographers those who follow tennis are a different breed from, say, pro-wrestling fans. But even if one learned that the majority of tennis fans vote Republican whereas the majority of pro-wrestling fans vote Democratic, what would that prove? To determine whether sports watching has some effect on one's politics, one would need to survey both sports fans and—to coin an ungainly phrase—non-sports fans. Yet I suspect that if social scientists ever do amass reams of data on this subject, they will not discover anything significant. For those who find sports boring are probably not more politically active—or more critical of capitalism—than those who cannot wait to turn on "Monday Night Football."

Guttmann's book focuses less on the charge that sport "is capitalism's safety valve" than on the much more common complaint that some sports are very violent and that this violence incites spectators to become violent. According to Guttmann, the evidence for this contention is non-existent. The Roman gladiatorial games were "probably the most violent sport of *any* time or place," Guttmann writes, but "their spectators were *less* violent than those who attended Roman and Byzantine chariot races." A chariot race that took place in Constantinople in A.D. 532 caused a mass riot that resulted in thirty thousand deaths.

A fascinating if somewhat breathless survey of the history of sports fans in Western culture, *Sports Spectators* suggests how difficult it is to make generalizations about spectators' attitudes towards violence. In early nineteenth-century England there was increasing resistance on the part of the middle and upper classes to such blood sports as dogfighting, cockfighting, bullbaiting, and badger-baiting. (Founded in 1824, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals campaigned against blood sports, and bullbaiting was prohibited in 1835, cockfighting in 1849.) Yet while many English aristocrats strongly opposed a dog being baited by a bear, they were enthusiastic proponents of a fox being chased by hounds, which tore their quarry to bits.

Guttmann also argues that blood sports led to noisy betting rather than violent crowds. A case in point is a particularly repulsive blood sport that was popular in nineteenth-century England: the dog and rat fight. Henry Mayhew, the chronicler of the London poor, paid a visit to a rat pit located in a pub, where he found that the "front of the long bar was crowded with men of every grade of society, all smoking, drinking, and talking about dogs."

The second part of *Sports Spectators* focuses on the arguments of those who dwell on the dark side of modern mass spectator sports. Although Guttmann's arguments are generally persuasive in this section, his prose falters—affected perhaps by the clotted prose of those whom he attacks. In the concluding chapter, trying to end on an upbeat note, Guttmann succumbs to fervent jargon: "We must maximize the positive potentiality of representational sports and make the most of sport's propensity for bringing people together." Guttmann is implying that somehow we can make sports watching serve to heal the scars in our body politic, but surely this is wishful thinking. Sports watching does bring people together, but the bond it creates—the bond of fanhood—lasts as long as the game lasts, unraveling in the postgame parking lot. There it's every driver for himself.

Alas, sports watching has very little "positive potentiality," though Guttmann is probably right to contend that modern sports fans are less violent than their forebears. After sporting events turned into a big business, the capitalists who invested great sums in them worried that disorderly crowds might hurt business, so they had a financial stake in crowd control.

Yet what about the violence of many British soccer fans—the so-called soccer hooligans? In May 1984, British hooligans went wild at a European Cup final in Belgium. Forty persons died and more than one hundred were injured. In a recent issue of *Encounter*, Jeffrey Richards recalls being on a train with a particularly nasty bunch of soccer hooligans who drank continuously and chanted about slashing, maiming, and killing anyone they met who was for a rival team. They also threw in a few lines about "gassing the Jews" and "sending the [black] bastards back." According to the author, "the world-view of this group was a sinister cocktail of racism, drunkenness, sexual aggression, and violence."

The author doesn't report that these toughs

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actually did anything. It was all talk—so far as he knew. But the question is not whether these soccer hooligans are as violent as they claim to be. Rather, it is: Does their violent talk—and, for all we know, violent behavior—have anything to do with soccer? Soccer, it would seem, is the occasion rather than the cause of their violence; they go to soccer games looking for violence. If there were no soccer games, they presumably would look for violent confrontations elsewhere.

If one is looking for really nasty violence, one needs only turn to some forms of contemporary music, some TV programs, and many movies. Despite occasional spasms of violence, the big three of American sports—football, baseball, and basketball—seem like islands of sanity and civility within popular culture's sea of raucous barbarism and smuttiness. Moreover, American spectators generally are bound by rules of civility and sportsmanship. They may yell "Kill the umpire," but they also boo when an athlete does something "unsporting." And they usually applaud an injured player from an opposing team when he is helped off the field. Though fans and athletes lose their tempers, the American sports fan's aggressiveness usually finds its outlet in contempt for a losing coach rather than hatred for an opposing team. Monday morning quarterbacking is the favorite pastime of sports fanatics, which is why losing coaches don't last very long in any professional sport.

Some neo-Marxists and would-be moralists bemoan the fact that sports—even college sports—are a commercial enterprise and that athletes like to make money: a puzzling charge, since few complain when rock stars make a lot of money from their so-called skills. Perhaps these complaints are made because some people expect athletes to be better than other people—think that because athletes possess such obvious physical grace they should also be endowed with moral "grace" and always be humbly grateful for the skills the good Lord gave them. This public expectation may be the reason why athletes are enlisted to "sell" charities, but I doubt that athletes are any better—or any worse—than the general public. They are simply blessed with a talent most of us (especially men) admire.

The dark side of sports is not its commercial aspect or the violence of sports fans, which is

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mainly a British problem. It is the use of sports to further state power. In Nicaragua, sportscasters sign off with the phrase, "Sports are the people's right," which means that the government has the right to control sports completely, using it as an instrument to ensure political conformity. Communist regimes also use their successful sports programs to boost their status as well as soften their image. In the last two Olympics, the Romanians displayed their outstanding gymnasts in order to persuade the world that Romania is not a harsh Stalinist dictatorship run by a megalomaniac but a country that rewards charm, energy, and talent. Hitler had similar goals in mind when he hosted the 1936 Olympics. For most fans, sporting events are attractive in part because they are a world elsewhere—a world where partisan feelings are aroused but nothing serious is at stake, a world where they can temporarily forget about the "real" world. Those who make sports serve political causes take away one of its most attractive characteristics.

But to get back to the fan: isn't there something unseemly and even grotesque about adults yelling their heads off and generally acting hysterically? In his tract *On Spectacles*, Tertullian said: "Look at the populace coming to the show—mad already! Disorderly, blind, excited already about its bets! . . .They are all in suspense, anxious suspense. One frenzy, one voice!" Tertullian's Romans were watching gladiatorial contests, not football games. The violence that we see in professional football is another matter altogether—ending not in death but in sprains and, occasionally, broken bones. Tertullian and Augustine were right to worry about the effects gladiatorial contests had on the hearts and minds of Romans, but I doubt very much that watching professional football has the same effect of making one crave violence. As for yelling and screaming, what's wrong with occasional bouts of antic behavior?

Nevertheless, even if sports watching or listening does not turn one into an ogre, isn't it a waste of time? Yes and no. No doubt, one could do something more edifying, but men at least need to know something about sports to get through the day. Sports talk, the lingua franca of American men, is a more interesting way of filling in the silences than discussing the weather. And there's something compellingly straightforward about a football game—or about any sporting event for that matter. As Frederick Exley says in *A Fan's Notes*, a somewhat lugubrious account of a man's obsession with the New York Giants in general and Frank Gifford in particular: "Why did football bring me so to life? I can't say precisely. Part of it was my feeling that football was an island of directness in a world of circumspection. In football a man was asked to do a difficult and brutal job, and he either did it or got out. There was nothing rhetorical or vague about it."

Yet, as with most comments about sports, Exley's remarks are vaguely unsatisfactory. For one thing, they don't explain why football is his obsession rather than some other sport that is direct, difficult, and brutal—say, boxing. Moreover, they don't get at what to my mind is the essential attraction of football: not that it is an island of directness but that it is an arena where there are dazzling performances that are easy to appreciate. In the performing arts, excellence is often in dispute or requires a very trained eye or ear to appreciate fully, so that judging performances in the arts fills many with anxiety. Disagreements about the performance of an athlete are rare and, unlike disagreements in politics, culture, or religion, they rarely are unpleasant.

The Chameleon

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE: A POLITICAL LIFE. Volume 1: THE ARCHITECT OF CHANGE, 1863–1912. *By Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert. Ohio State University Press. $40.*

Reviewed by J. M. LIPKIS

Three brilliant egotists careened across Britain's political landscape in the first half of the twentieth century, lurching between parties, trampling the sensibilities of staid politicians, and inspiring and infuriating millions. In power they were never entirely trusted, out of power they were never ignored. Of the three—Winston Churchill, Oswald Mosley, and David Lloyd George—the latter has, cu-

J. M. LIPKIS teaches English at Pennsylvania State University. He is currently working on a biography of Sir Herbert Samuel.

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riously, remained most out of focus. "Who shall paint the chameleon, who can tether a broomstick?" asked Maynard Keynes near the beginning of a brief sketch of his former chief at Versailles. Was Lloyd George a plucky Welsh patriot, an ardent social reformer who conquered the House of Lords and masterminded Britain's Welfare State, then courageously guided the imperiled nation through World War I? Or was he an unscrupulous demagogue, a charlatan, a hopeless womanizer, an irredeemably corrupt opportunist? He was more than a little of both, of course, but until the mid-1970s, biographies tended to be hagiographies or demonographies. Recent books by Peter Rowland and John Grigg offer more balanced accounts. Though both are admirable, lucid works, neither author is an academic historian, and this first volume of a new biography by B. B. Gilbert promises a still more thorough and analytic approach. Lloyd George, Gilbert believes, was "the archetypal political man," a fact not adequately appreciated by the earlier biographers—hence, Gilbert's subtitle. What is gained and lost by observing Lloyd George through this lens, by treating him *sub specie politica*?

The first thing to be said is that Gilbert's Volume 1, which takes Lloyd George through 1911, is a prodigious work of scholarship. It will be indispensable for anyone interested in its subject or in the tumultuous period in British history it encompasses. However, Lloyd George the man tends to disappear. There is a sense in which he is relegated to the opening pages of chapter 1, entitled, in fact, "The Man." Gilbert is in part reacting to what he considers undue emphasis in earlier works on Lloyd George's many romantic liaisons. Yet to liken "The Goat's" notorious promiscuity to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's stamp collecting, as Gilbert does, is a little disingenuous. Gilbert may also be guilty of throwing out the wife with the mistresses; Maggie Owen probably exerted more of an influence on her husband than she is credited with. Even the suffragettes are given short shrift.

More important, Lloyd George's magnificent personality, trenchantly summarized by Gilbert in the opening section, is soon eclipsed by an impressive welter of data on his political and legislative accomplishments. The Welshman was a genius of persuasion. He knew how to charm individuals and provoke crowds. Gilbert details the results of Lloyd George's adroit manipulations, but the artistry of the performances somehow escapes him—and so do its causes, insofar as these can ever be accounted for. The reader seeking insights into a powerful character's convoluted psyche will be disappointed. Gilbert does extensively document two important aspects of Lloyd George's political personality: his fondness for righteous indignation (he was a master of sarcasm) and his simultaneous penchant for compromise, despite his intransigence on the platform.

An expressly political life promises a coherent and illuminating structure. The great advantage of the earlier, highly partisan, biographies was that they argued a rudimentary thesis; they were not merely successions of anecdotes. The looming question Gilbert addresses is not, of course, whether Lloyd George was heroic or wicked, but, baldly stated, whether or not he was sincere. Did the man who ushered in the Welfare State believe in what he was doing?

A little background is in order. Lloyd

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George was associated with many causes throughout his early career. He was at various times an eloquent spokesman for three discrete but overlapping "ideologies" within the Liberal Party—Radicalism, militant Nonconformism, and Welsh nationalism. Anti-imperialism perhaps most galvanized aging Radicals by the last decade of the nineteenth century, since free trade, the paramount Radical issue, had long been secured. Radicals also hoped to foster—at as little expense as possible—the liberation of oppressed nationalities, beginning with the Irish. Indeed, Gladstone's obsession with (or devotion to) Irish Home Rule had shattered the party in 1886. Radicals also sought to make Britain more democratic by abolishing the House of Lords and extending the franchise. "Land reform," which meant taxing landlords, was another attractive issue. Here the old animus toward the aristocracy was rekindled by the writings of the American Henry George.

Nonconformists pressed avidly for temperance legislation ("local option"), secular education, and disestablishment of the Anglican Church. The latter was only a real possibility in Wales, which had become a Liberal stronghold. But the principality also witnessed a surge of nationalism quite independent of chapel agitation, part of a larger cultural revival inspired, inevitably, by middle-class intellectuals. Disestablishment was only the first step for young Welsh dissidents, who hoped to found a quasi-independent nation.

What, of this lengthy agenda, did Lloyd George actually believe in? Very little, concludes Gilbert. Cottage-bred barrister that he was, Lloyd George was never quite comfortable with the wealthy, university-educated partisans of Young Wales. He didn't even like the place, and eventually settled in Surrey. His attempts to create a Welsh party were probably what his South Wales rivals understood them to be—an effort at self-promotion. On the other hand, he was neither an abstainer nor a churchgoer, and privately bridled at the constraints of nonconformist dogma. The one issue he genuinely believed in, Gilbert argues, was land reform. From his days as "the poacher's lawyer" to the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, Lloyd George's favorite target remained the lazy, bigoted, grasping landlord. This was, Gilbert points out, a rural and not a specifically Welsh grievance. The struggle of the working class, in Wales and elsewhere, never really engaged Lloyd George's sympathy.

Gilbert's cynicism is probably justified. In at least one case, Gilbert may be overstressing his subject's strategic considerations—Lloyd George's opposition to the Boer War. This in time made him a national figure, but the position was hardly popular at the outset. Lloyd George was interested, certainly, in discrediting the government with his attacks on inefficiency, expense, and war profiteering. However, his repeated identification of the Boers' cause with that of Wales appears to have been genuine. The English were, in effect, absentee landlords in South Africa; and the men they were supporting—the mine owners—were themselves landlords (and worse, German Jews—Lloyd George's anti-Semitism was one of his least attractive features).

Lloyd George's stand on the Boer War was nonetheless courageous: he was nearly lynched in Birmingham for it. And it won him the admiration of a group of young Liberal intellectuals who were intent on radically revising the party's agenda. Influenced by Charles Booth's and Seebohm Rowntree's studies of poverty, by T. H. Green's Hegelianism, and Bismarck's social reforms, and, inevitably, by the ubiquitous Webbs, these "New Liberals" sought a much more encompassing role for the state. Traditional Liberalism wished to curb governmental power (except for controlling the liquor trade); the New Liberals argued that the state had an obligation to support the poor, the aged, and the unemployed.

On Lloyd George's initiative, the Liberal government did precisely this between 1908 and 1914. Gilbert masterfully documents the party's legislative triumphs (and, significantly, the cavalier way the Chancellor and Herbert Asquith estimated costs). If the mercurial Welshman was never a bona fide Old Radical, did he eventually become a committed New Liberal? Predictably, Gilbert maintains that he did not, but adds an interesting twist.

The Liberal government that was appointed in 1905 was swept back into power early the next year by the largest majority to date. But by 1908 the party was faltering badly. It had lost twelve seats in by-elections, the opinion

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polls of the day. "Humdrum Liberalism won't win elections," Lloyd George had maintained as early as 1885, and it was clear that political expediency dictated dramatic action. The traditional view is that Lloyd George, when he proposed his famous 1909 budget, was looking over his left shoulder. The Labour Representation Committee had startled the nation by capturing twenty-nine seats in 1906. Three years later, through defections and by-elections, the rechristened Labour Party boasted forty-six M.P.s. Newly enfranchised workingmen were clearly rallying to the party representing their interests. Gilbert, however, disputes the notion that Lloyd George, through social reform, hoped to staunch a working-class flow toward Labour.

> [T]he origins of Liberal social reform have nothing to do with the Labour party as such and . . . the competition, as Lloyd George saw it, came from the right, from the demagogic Unionism of Chamberlain, while the content of his program derived from his own Welsh background.

This, surely, goes too far. When Chamberlain launched his dramatic Tariff Reform campaign in 1903, he had in fact promised that import duties would finance public welfare projects. But by 1906, when he suffered an incapacitating stroke, it was clear that he had failed to sway the country. "Stomach taxes" still horrified the working class. Moreover, Lloyd George, while he never underestimated Chamberlain, was keenly aware of the threat from Labour. "Unless we can prove," he warned in 1904, "as I think we can, that there is no necessity for a separate party to press forward the legitimate claims of Labour, you will find that . . . the Liberal Party will be practically wiped out. . . ." Two decades later, this came to pass.

As to the content of his programs, Lloyd George may not have read much (like Eisenhower, he was addicted to Westerns), but in office he was surrounded by men who were outspoken New Liberals, Charles Masterman most notable among them. Though Lloyd George was no ideologue, representing him as simply a consummate politician fired by boyhood grievances may be to unduly discount the man's intellectual development. Keynes's chameleon was perhaps, at moments, pinker than Gilbert credits him with being. But then great figures, in politics and in art, always manage to elude labels, categories, and the scholarly cages we build for them. That, in part, is what makes them great.

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The Reader Replies . . . . . .

Perverse and Inspired Genius

In his admirable discussion surveying a possible "conspiracy of silence by British and American scholars" concerning Coleridge's intellectual appropriation in your Spring 1988 issue, it is odd that Emerson Marks does not mention the 1983 edition of the *Biographia Literaria* in the Princeton Collected Coleridge, whose thoroughness he elsewhere praises. In it, editors James Engell and W. Jackson Bate not only print the sources Coleridge drew upon, acknowledged or not, with literal translations, but also address in their preface the whole subject of plagiarism head-on, expanding upon Professor Bate's insightful discussion published as long ago as 1968 in his brief biography, *Coleridge* (Macmillan, "Masters of World Literature"). Inquiring spirits should find them enlightening for making up their own minds.

Warren Keith Wright
Arbyrd, Missouri

Plagues, History, and AIDS

Robert M. Swenson, in "Plagues, History, and AIDS" (The American Scholar, Spring 1988), states that one of the four fluids capable of transmitting infection with HIV is vaginal secretions. This is incorrect. The vagina is lined with epithelium, and so it does not secrete. The cervix has glands that secrete. The cervical secretions are found in the vagina. The vestibule and orifice of the vagina have a number of glands, named Bartholin and paraurethral or Skene, which also produce secretions that may be found in the vagina. Other etiologies for the origin of AIDS in humans than those mentioned by Swenson, hunting and slaughter of monkeys, have been proposed, including bites of humans by monkeys and sexual activity between humans and monkeys. There is also a rumor, unsubstantiated to date to my knowledge, that HIV is the product of biological warfare research that was accidently, or perhaps not so accidently, disseminated. "Part of the problem is the long lag period between HIV infection and the development of AIDS," states Swenson. This is not "part" of the problem, but rather a very significant factor that makes the analogies provided by the author of plague, smallpox, influenza, and gonorrhea wrong. A better analogy would be syphilis where the dire life-threatening tertiary stage involving the nervous and cardiovascular systems occurs decades after the untreated initial infection, while the person infected may continue to infect others. The many years of asymptomatic HIV infection leading to the potential of innocent infection of many others until overt AIDS develops is the crux of the matter. While legislators, lawyers, civil libertarians, and others are concerned about the rights of high-risk groups infected with HIV and individuals infected with HIV and deal with the epidemic from a socio-political perspective, the rights of the uninfected and the responsibilities of the infected not to infect the uninfected go unrecognized, which they would not if this epidemic were dealt with as it should be—as a public health issue, no more and no less.

Finally, different from other infectious agents responsible for past epidemics, it seems on the basis of statistical projections that eventually, given enough time, all those infected with HIV will develop AIDS, ARC or other symptom complex that is 100 percent lethal. All other previous epidemics caused by an infectious micro-organism have not had 100 percent lethality.

Sylvain Fribourg, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.
Panorama City, California

In "Plagues, History, and AIDS," Robert M. Swenson makes these statements:

> The threat of sexually transmitted diseases has never had a significant effect on sexual activity, and it is not likely to now. (p. 194)

> Homosexual males have already dramatically altered their sexual behavior and will continue to do so. (p. 196)

Surely the latter statement contradicts the former?

Robert B. Kunkel
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

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DR. SWENSON replies: Dr. Fribourg presents correctly the physiology of the secretions present in the vagina. This does not alter the fact that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is present in these fluids in numbers sufficient to transmit infection from female to male during sexual intercourse. There are several possible ways in which HIV may have been transmitted from subhuman primates to humans. I would think that blood-borne transmission during capture or slaughter of monkeys is most likely. This occurs frequently and is the most efficient mode of transmission. Transmission through monkey bites would be a far less efficient mechanism. Sexual activity between humans and monkeys probably occurs, but much less frequently, and would certainly be the least efficient mode of transmission. The examples of plague, smallpox, and influenza epidemics were presented to show the varied ways to which infectious diseases may influence history. I agree, for all the reasons stated, that syphilis is most similar to AIDS.

Several people have raised the question of HIV being the result of an accident of biological warfare research. In order to be effective in biological warfare, an infectious agent must be stable, easily stored and distributed, highly contagious, have a short incubation period, and briefly immobilize, but not kill, a population. (The goal of their use is to briefly immobilize a population so that an invading force can easily take over. However, it is important that the population remain intact to continue to carry out essential functions.) HIV is very fragile, not easily stored, exceedingly difficult to transmit, and the disease it produces has a tremendously long incubation period. Therefore, I find it hard to believe that retroviruses have ever been considered, let alone worked with, for use in biological warfare.

Finally, I believe that the rights of the uninfected are constantly being considered rather than being ignored. The problem, as I see it, is more often the reverse. Society is frequently willing to overrule the rights of the infected. As to the idea of "innocent infection" (which to me implies "guilty infection"), that only seems applicable to perinatal transmission. All of us can easily protect ourselves from HIV infection by not sharing needles and by not having sex with someone who is infected. These two decisions are solely in the hands of each and every individual and are totally independent of what other infected individuals may do.

Mr. Kunkel points out an obvious contradiction. Somewhere in the editing of the drafts of the essay a phrase was omitted. The first sentence should have read, "It has been reported that homosexual males have already dramatically altered their sexual behavior, etc. . . ." These data are from small groups of highly motivated, well-educated, white middle-class gay men. They are only a small fraction of the total number of homosexual males. This group may well have altered their sexual behavior, but I doubt that this is occurring among the majority of gay men. Historically, there have been few examples of significant changes in sexual behavior resulting from fear of venereal diseases. Sex, like drugs, tends to be highly addictive. A public health policy based solely on telling people to say no to sex or drugs is doomed to fail. We must also make these activities safer.

How to Select a Supreme Court Justice

The arguments contained in the article "How to Select a Supreme Court Justice" by David P. Bryden (Spring 1988) would, in my opinion, have been quite reasonable had the rejection of Judge Bork been strictly along the political lines that were discussed. However, they are rather irrelevant in view of the character assassination which preceded the rejection and which, moreover, proved crucial to the Senate action. The negative alignment of the southern conservative senators exemplified by Howell Heflin would have been impossible had the intense campaign among the black "swing" vote been absent (see "The War Against Robert Bork" by Suzanne Garment, *Commentary*, Vol. 85, pp. 17–26, January 1988). There was a very intense marshalling of forces ("black" organizations, pro-abortion groups, etc.) strongly amplified by a hostile press, which in the final analysis proved to be overwhelming. In contrast, the pitiful efforts of the Reagan administration based on the merits of the case were laughable in their ineffectiveness. This perversion of the Senate's "advise and consent" role has unquestionably caused severe damage to the legitimacy of the entire edifice of our national government. According to press reports, the good judge is now planning a counterattack that will further erode the legitimacy of the system. I doubt that he has thought of this angle, but exposing the rot that exists within our national legislature (aptly cartooned as a barrel of pork) is certainly worth the effort regardless of the outcome.

ROBERT C. WHITTEN
Cupertino, California

DAVID P. BRYDEN replies: If Dr. Whitten means that the Senate should not consider a nominee's positions on specific constitutional issues, then he is simply assuming the answer to the very difficult question I discussed in my essay, rather than responding to my arguments. If, on the other hand, his point is that Judge Bork's opponents distorted his record, then he is expressing an opinion on a topic that I did not discuss, and on which I tried to reserve judgment in the last sentence of my piece. We should always criticize political distortions, but that is quite different from saying that politics per se

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is objectionable. I happen to like some of Judge Bork's "political" tendencies, and that—rather than his technical expertise—is the main reason why I would not have been troubled if he had been confirmed. I suspect that the same is true of Dr. Whitten.

Lewis Mumford

Poor Professor Wilfred M. McClay! In his article on Lewis Mumford (Winter 1988), one sees that Lewis Mumford could have been an American scholar of the first rank if only he had kept to the straight-and-narrow dispassionate ideal of the academy. Perhaps Mumford could have even gotten tenure somewhere!

Although I admire McClay's lucid account of Mumford's work, it is clear that McClay cannot conceive that Mumford not only rejects many of the "things" of modern civilization (while retaining its valid achievements), but that he rejects the underlying premises of the modern epoch and systematically proposes new ones in their place.

McClay's bone of contention seems to be that "prophets" challenge "the people" but that "the people" have an innate propensity for doing right. Hence to call for organic planning makes Mumford into a "philosopher-king" who challenges democratic pluralism. Hence Mumford's criticism of the inauthentic nostalgia inherent in the pseudo-Roman "White City" of the Columbian Exposition ignored the "unforgettable impression in the minds of its millions of visitors." McClay would undoubtedly disagree with Louis Sullivan's "prophecy" that those same millions "departed joyously, carriers of contagion, unaware that what they had beheld and believed to be truth was to prove, in historic fact, an appalling calamity . . . a naked exhibitionism of charlantry in the higher feudal and domineering culture, conjoined with expert salesmanship of the materials of decay." Sullivan, like another critic of the Exposition, Henry Adams, sensed the coming anti-democratic culture of mass consumerism: life as an entertainment. Today, when the high nostalgia of neo-classic architecture has fused itself with its seeming ascetic modern opposite to produce the titillating pasties of postmodern architecture, as found, say, in the works of Philip Johnson and John Burgee, Sullivan's and Adams's prophetic intuitions have a renewed significance. But the rational mind is embarrassed by the human capacity *to sense* and passionately interpret the deeper import of things, and so belittles this interpretative sensitivity by labeling it "prophecy," as though it were hocus-pocus.

Mumford, according to McClay, "has always had an almost blinding hatred for the automobile," another example of McClay putting Mumford into a neat dichotomy. Mumford does decry the destructive effects of the virtual monopoly of the automobile, "the chief architect of the American city," but he also believes it should have its place within a varied system of transportation. McClay seems to think that any intervention on the "free market" of the automobile industry leads to "unprecedented levels of government coercion," as though the history of the rise to power of the automobile and oil companies after World War II is free from government and big industry power plays: McClay sees it as a kind of bestowing of power to the people, self-moving, auto-mobile. He cheerfully ignores the evisceration and malling of the American city that the "song of my auto" has brought about.

The deepest American thinkers—Melville, Charles Peirce, Lewis Mumford—have been pessimistic, and their dark visions too easily buried by the glib American optimism. McClay may not be glib, but his rationalist view must lampoon that which falls outside of its understanding. He must leave out of account volume one of Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine, Technics and Human Development* (1967), which unfolds a profound philosophical anthropology of the human signifying nature. He must caricature as "bloated anti-technological tirades" volume two, *The Pentagon of Power* (1970), in which Mumford's passionate call for a rehumanized technology frames that technology against a systematized mechanization in the modern ethos that would divest the world of human purposes. Mumford proposes the outlines of a new epoch, but that is anathema to a time in which the right celebrates minimalism in government and maximalism in the military machine, and the left celebrates "neopragmatist" situationalism: both allow the underlying premises of modernity to go uncriticized and disallow any such large-scale criticisms—as long as people can drive their cars in and out of their unlivable cities.

McClay rightly points to the virtual absence of Mumford from contemporary intellectual life, but is blissfully unaware that when Mumford is not ignored by contemporary intellectuals, he is whittled down to their size. The contemporary American scholar simply cannot bear the emotional depths and cosmic heights of the incandescent human creature that Mumford, especially in his later works, both embodies and vividly portrays.

Eugene Rochberg-Halton
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana

Wilfred McClay replies: It appears that to criticize the incandescent Lewis Mumford is automatically to endorse clogged freeways, eviscerated cities, postmodern architecture, Pentagon cost-overruns, "neopragmatist situationalism," suburban

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malls, and other modern horrors. Then again, perhaps it is only to criticize Lewis Mumford. I never said, or implied, that Mumford's many concerns were foolish or unjustified; on the contrary. But I do believe, to alter the saying slightly, that what is useful in Mumford's work is not very original, and what is original is not, on the whole, very useful.

Mumford claimed to have rejected the "underlying premises of modernity," and to have put new ones in their place; but this is simply not so. Such was my point in tracing his early enthusiasm for Emerson, for the machine, and for stripped-down organic functionalism—an enthusiasm that coexisted, incongruously enough, with his affinity for Adams and his reservations about technological "progress." It was as if he were trying to be Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke at one and the same time—to be, as it were, a demystifying traditionalist, or an anti-progressive progressive. Had his work acknowledged this conflict, and explored it with candor and humility, we would have seen a far different, far richer *oeuvre*. For one thing, Mumford the modernist would certainly have taken the powerful claims of tradition, custom, religion, and historical consciousness far more seriously than he ever has. He might also have confronted the fact that one cannot plausibly call for both a locally empowered participatory democracy and a centrally planned reconstruction of the existing society and economy. Since there is much danger in the exclusive pursuit of either alternative, the best the reformer can hope for is, again, a fruitful tension between the two; yet Mumford's grandiose and abstract visions consistently failed to engage the real-world problems and constant adjustments inherent in that tension. There is something inhuman in this humanism, and one can sense it even in the peculiar abstractness and flatness of Mumford's prose. That, in short, is why Mumford's influence has fallen short of what it might have been—because as the scope of his work expanded more and more, less and less of it became genuinely useful to anyone. For Professor Rochberg-Halton to blame Mumford's neglect upon the limitations of academe is not only self-contradictory, but wrong.

The Stakes in Anthropology

Ernest Gellner's article in the Winter 1988 issue attributes to the realm of reason a special status in its capacity to conduct analyses of culture and society. Although he refers to the historic beginnings of realms, including the realm of reason, as a mythic construct, he has no compunctions in attributing to the *Gesellschaft* of the Hapsburg Empire and to the imperialism of the British the very grounds for the birth of the appropriate style of anthropologic inquiry. Nor has he any hesitation in ascribing to the writing of the American Declaration of Independence an idiosyncracy unrivaled by any other historic occurrence. Now the *Gesellschaft* is an Open Society, is individualist and cosmopolitan, a kind of international court, world-wide, universal in its domain, empowered to do the work of exploring the concrete social structures of the *Gemeinschaft* and re-examining questions of genetic development. This program on a broad canvas is quite attractive, yet, as Gellner's essay proves, in need of defense against those like Clifford Geertz who ask just where in the self-proclaimed ascendancy the *Gesellschaft* draws its power, its sense that its claim of reason is, in fact, self-evident.

Only in Gellner's last sentence do I find his recognition of a need for an examination of the *Gesellschaft*'s grounding, for a study of "how both reason and unreason come to be socially incarnate and what can give birth to either." Note, however, that this challenge is addressed to matters of history, what Gellner had called an enterprise of myth. On the other hand, Geertz's analysis of British anthropological practices (as exemplified by Evans Pritchard) actually is an account, Malinowskian in style, of a realm subscribing to reason as its central power. Such a realm, as Geertz observes, shores up its ascendancy with a clarity of prose, for clarity is the aesthetic hallmark of reason, yet to create such an effect a suppression of "any struggle with words" is essential. And rightly so, for were the struggle evident, then the hegemony of reason as somehow emergent from logical procedures would be suspect.

Curiously, Gellner does not try to reveal shortcomings in Geertz's argument. What he does instead is to inquire into possible alternatives to the *Gesellschaft*, and not surprisingly he fixes on the character of Hamlet, a prince and intellectual who finds himself so deeply distanced from the realm of power that he both destroys it and himself. So a model of tragedy serves as a defense of *Gesellschaft*.

The argument is largely epistemological. What can anthropologists know and what grounds for certainty are there? My sense is that Gellner's program for study of society and culture with a fine sense of the concrete is in need of supplementing—the kind of awareness that Geertz encourages, an effort to examine and to grasp one's own assumptions and procedures. This approach, a combination of the exploratory and the self-exploratory, is not characteristic of Hamlet, however, for so long as we have a community of scholars who attend to one another's models, who enter into analysis of epistemological claims and premises, the work of anthropology need not fear crisis.

EUGENE GREEN
Brookline, Massachusetts

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An Afternoon with Agnon

Baruch Hochman's article in the Winter 1988 SCHOLAR was strangely entertaining and disturbing. However, it seemed to be described—or informed—by the Master's original surname, "Czaczkes," which means *toys* or *playthings*, both literally and figuratively (Hebrew/Yiddish).

ART J. MORGAN
New York, New York

Quotatious

I've read and relished Aristides' column since it began. One thing I've appreciated in his writing is that, though he is fond of the vernacular, he hasn't used the vulgar vernacular. Until "Quotatious" (Winter 1988), that is—and there Aristides is, quoting Alfred Jarry saying, "Screw good taste."

It's late in the eighties, and I suppose that kind of gracelessness was inevitable; it's quite tame, after all. But, as Eugene Field said, " 'Tis a pitiful sound to hear!" in one so witty and facile and with twenty-one-plus books of quotations to choose from.

E. S. EPLEY
Lexington, Virginia

Anthelme Brillat-Savarin was no Yip Harburg when it came to writing a good lyric, but sometimes he threw a memorable bone, or bon-mot: "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are" [1825]. I am neither *zibn* nor *zibetsik*, but I do know that quotational types [Aristides in "Quotatious"] would get more points with Savarin than with Gayelord Hauser. As the song says: "Climb Every Montaigne."

SHERWIN B. NULAND
New Haven, Connecticut

Gibbon's Historical Imagination

G. W. Bowersock in the Winter 1988 SCHOLAR mentions a number of writers who found inspiration in Gibbon's work. I think, too, that Yeats found in Gibbon the source for the imagery of the last stanza of *Sailing to Byzantium*, though he did not remember it. The last stanza of the poem reads:

> Once out of nature I shall never take
> My bodily form from any natural thing,
> But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
> Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
> To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
> Or set upon a golden bough to sing
> To lords and ladies of Byzantium
> Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

In the notes in the collected editions of his poem, Yeats says, "I have read somewhere that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang."

The source may well be in chapter LIII of Gibbon's history, where Gibbon describes the palace of Theophilus. He says, "His fanciful magnificence employed the skill and patience of such artists as the times could afford; . . . a golden tree, with its leaves and branches, which sheltered a multitude of birds warbling their artificial notes."

W. A. CHAPIN
Gore, Virginia

Erratum

A few years ago the story told of Samuel Johnson's alleged "put-down" of his wife that appeared in your Autumn 1987 issue was told of Noah Webster. Any lexicographer would serve for a joke of the kind, and this one will not be found in Boswell, Fanny Burney, or Mrs. Thrale.

Are not facts, as well as opinions, worthy of attention? A few months ago someone referred in your periodical to George Lyman Kittredge as "of Yale," and apparently no correction of this startling error has appeared. William Lyon Phelps, a Yale professor who had studied under Kittredge at Harvard, was the Yale Commencement orator in 1924 when Yale, following the example of four other universities that are peers of Yale, as well as one in Canada—four more, including the University of Oxford, were to follow—spoke of Kittredge as "generally acknowledged to be the foremost English scholar in America." Kittredge, who graduated from Harvard with first honors and honors in both the Classics and English, taught at Harvard from 1888 till his retirement in 1936.

CLYDE K. HYDER
Greenwich, Connecticut

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